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Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 21 April 2008

Lundi 21 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 21 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 21 avril 2008

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FAMILIES FOR A SECURE FUTURE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus about the organization known as Families for a Secure Future. As you may know, Families for a Secure Future is a unique organization which is dedicated to creating circles of support around people with disabilities and their families. The goal is to allow the disabled person to reach his or her full potential and to promote inclusion in our society. It also allows parents the comfort of knowing that those supports will be there for their child when they are gone.

My colleague the member for Dufferin–Caledon just last week asked the Minister of Community and Social Services for $90,000 to allow this highly effective group to continue to provide its services. One of the responses received from the minister suggested that the PC Party would like to reduce the social services budget. I would like to make it clear that the official opposition is not asking to take services away from anyone in need of them. The party looks only to spend government dollars in a way which would be most fiscally responsible.

Families for a Secure Future is a perfect example of fiscally responsible spending. Giving $90,000 to Families for a Secure Future would save our province millions of dollars in reduction of hospital, crisis and long-term-care beds being accessed by those who would, with this organization's assistance, be able to remain in the community with effective supports. I urge this government to reconsider their decision to deny Families for a Secure Future this $90,000, which will save our government millions and provide those with disabilities the priceless dignity of living in the community.

BÉNÉVOLES

M. Gilles Bisson: Cette bonne fin de semaine, on a eu la chance à Mattice de donner les honneurs à ceux et celles de notre communauté qui ont fait du travail volontaire.

Vous savez que dans les communautés telles que Mattice et autres, ce sont les bénévoles qui font le cœur de la communauté. Sans les bénévoles, ceci voudrait dire que les services qu'on prend pour acquis, tels que ce qui se passe au sous-sol de l'église, ce qui se passe avec le club de hockey, ce qui se passe avec d'autres organisations, dont le baseball, les louveteaux et autres, ne marcheraient pas. C'est eux qui font le cœur de la communauté.

Donc, ce dimanche, on a eu l'honneur, avec le préfet de Mattice, le conseil municipal et autres, de donner les honneurs à ceux et celles qui ont travaillé dans cette communauté pendant des années pour donner à cette communauté le cœur qui est Mattice.

J'étais très fier d'être là de la part de tous les députés de l'Assemblée législative pour reconnaître cet ouvrage que ces gens ont fait et de dire bravo et chapeau à tous ceux et celles qui ont fait du bénévolat dans la communauté de Mattice. C'était un honneur, et on regarde à continuer ce bel ouvrage dans la communauté, parce qu'on sait que Mattice est ce qu'elle est grâce aux gens qui demeurent là.

RIDING OF NORTHUMBERLAND–QUINTE WEST

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'm proud to rise in the House today, proud to tell you about the constituents in my riding of Northumberland–Quinte West.

When Mayor Hector Macmillan of Trent Hills declared a state of emergency due to flooding from the Trent and Crowe rivers, he sent out a plea for volunteers to help. Well, help he got. I had an opportunity, with the warden and the mayor, to visit the site and see these volunteers roll up their sleeves, fill sandbags, and even deliver them to those in fear of being flooded. These volunteers, friends and family came from all parts of the riding and from other communities to help their neighbours.

I could not be more proud than I am today of the amazing people who live in Northumberland–Quinte West. They willingly dropped everything to lend a helping hand. Through steady contact and updates from Mayor Macmillan, I'm happy to report the worst is over.

This weekend has reaffirmed to me that I live in the best riding in the best province in the best country in the world, and that is Northumberland–Quinte West.

JOHN DIGBY

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to recognize an outstanding resident of my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, Dr. John Digby.

This weekend, Dr. Digby was recognized as the 2008 Volunteer of the Year by the Huntsville Hospital Foundation. Dr. Digby has given generously of his time and energies to the community for many years. He was co-chair of the capital campaign for the Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Foundation day surgery project that raised more than $5 million. He has just started his third term on the board of directors for the Huntsville Hospital Foundation. And John is now the hospital foundation chair of the planning committee for the upcoming capital campaign. Dr. Digby believes strongly in supporting the Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Foundation and does all he personally can for this cause.

John is a member of the Huntsville Probus Club and an avid golfer. I also happen to know that he previously belonged to the Huntsville choir. Dr. Digby practised in Toronto as a rheumatologist, and continues today to work as a physician consultant. He and his wife, Donna, reside in Huntsville and are very active in the community.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. John Digby for his outstanding volunteerism and support for the hospital foundation and the people who are served by the hospital.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Bill Mauro: I rise today to say how pleased I am about this morning's announcement that was made by the Trillium Gift of Life Network. As you are aware, Ontarians will now be compensated for out-of-pocket expenses when they become living organ donors.

As an addition to this morning's announcement, our Minister of Health, George Smitherman, has announced a new $500,000 program that our government will fund to reduce the travel costs associated with organ recipients who must travel for transplant surgery. The TGLN will administer the fund and will solicit/accept donations from others wishing to enhance our government's contribution.

This announcement ties in with an event I attended this past Saturday in Thunder Bay. I had the pleasure of participating in the 10th annual Run for Life to raise awareness about organ donation. This fun 5K run/walk was a huge success, and to my knowledge it may be the largest organ donation awareness event in the province. It included approximately 500 people, many of whom are organ recipients and donor family members.

I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize some of the committee members responsible for organizing the Run for Life, including Gary Cooper; Sandra Petzel, the organ donor coordinator of the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre; and Janet MacLean, the vice-president of the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

I'm thrilled with the new additional funding our government is assigning for organ donation, and I want to reiterate how proud I am of the volunteers who participated in this year's Run for Life.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Tomorrow, April 22, is Earth Day, and as we approach Earth Day, the citizens of Simcoe North are aware that the county of Simcoe has applied to the Ministry of the Environment for a permit to pump hundreds of millions of litres of water per year to dewater the future location of landfill site 41.

My office has received thousands of letters and e-mails from constituents who are horrified to think that this government might even consider pumping good, clean water into a ditch so that the landfill could be constructed above an aquifer—an aquifer that feeds two municipal water systems, Elmvale and Wyevale, each less than five kilometres away.

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This permit to take water presents a huge problem for the Minister of the Environment. First of all, as the previous Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Minister Gerretsen would like to think that he has developed a close friendship with the county of Simcoe. He made an appearance at the county of Simcoe where he promised nothing and received a beautiful painting. As well, Minister Gerretsen was the architect of the so-called intergovernmental action plan, that would see a growth plan of a minimum of 240,000 additional people in the county of Simcoe over the next 25 years. There are hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure investment required to accommodate the growth, but not one cent is guaranteed by this government.

When the county of Simcoe narrowly passed a vote last year to proceed with site 41, I suspect the Minister of the Environment would have hoped that the opposition to site 41 was over. However, the water-taking permit application has only fuelled the fire. The opposition now is greater than ever. The minister is in a difficult position, but he should do what is right and either pass my bill, Waste Disposal Site 41 in the Township of Tiny Act, 2008, or bring in his own legislation that parallels the Adams Mine Lake Act passed by this government in the last Parliament.

ONTARIO PRODUCE

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I rise in the House today to remind my colleagues and fellow Ontarians of our wonderful Pick Ontario Freshness strategy. It's aimed at building awareness of, and demand for, the fresh, high-quality foods grown and produced right here in Ontario.

The best part of this strategy is that everyone can participate in Pick Ontario Freshness, from the restaurant industry to agrifood producers as well as grocery stores and consumers. The Pick Ontario Freshness strategy includes an expansion of the Foodland Ontario program to include deli-fresh meats, dairy, baked goods, as well as fruits and vegetables, boosting the Savour Ontario program to promote Ontario food in our restaurants.

The strategy also includes an advertising program, which I'm sure most of us have seen on television, with that catchy jingle that goes, "Good things grow in Ontario." Those ads are definitely working because a recent Foodland survey reported that 94% of grocery store shoppers recognized the brand, and 87% of the shoppers

preferred Ontario product when they were given the opportunity to pick it.

Because of its success, the government has invested an additional $56 million over the next four years into the Pick Ontario Freshness strategy. This strategy not only benefits the environment, but it ensures that Ontario farmers have a successful and sustainable future.

I encourage everyone to take part in this initiative and Pick Ontario Freshness. Ontario farmers are outstanding in their fields, and good things do grow in Ontario.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's with great pleasure that I rise today, on the first day of Earth Week, to speak to what the McGuinty government is doing to address climate change. We know that we need to address climate change from every angle. The causes and effects of climate change are all around us, but so are the solutions.

With all the information out there, one would think by now we could move beyond the rhetoric of the climate change skeptics. Unfortunately, one of those skeptics is the new member of the Conservative Party, who said last year, "I don't see greenhouse gases as the terrible evil that some others see." This was said when arguing in favour of keeping Ontario coal plants open.

This government is getting rid of dirty coal and closing our coal plants by the end of 2014. We have introduced a $1.15-billion Next Generation of Job Funds to partner with businesses who create green jobs.

In order to address climate change, we have to change how we think about our planet's limits. We have to embrace an economy that will bring forth innovative ideas for a green and sustainable future. That's what this government is doing, and will continue to do for the sake of our collective future.

Thank you for allowing me to speak and address this issue, because it's very important for all of us.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise today to speak about a transit issue that has been the cause for significant community concern in the riding of York South–Weston: the air-rail link from Pearson airport to downtown Toronto. I have been working hard, together with the community, to fight against any proposal to put a non-stop, high-speed train through Weston.

Since my election as MPP, I have met with the chair of Metrolinx, with representatives of the airport authority, with many local residents, as well as the government ministers. My message to them has been the same: There can be no high-speed train running non-stop through Weston Road. Any rail service travelling through Weston must stop at Weston Road, therefore eliminating street closures.

The community must benefit and have access to any new service. Any such service cannot impede the priority by the TTC or Metrolinx to move forward with important transit project in York South–Weston, such as the Eglinton LRT. Any environmental impact must be no greater than that of GO trains, which are a common service through Weston.

Fortunately, the Ministry of Transportation indicated last summer that if the air-rail link project selects the Georgetown corridor, its preference is to have the trains stop in the community, providing additional service to local residents.

I remain confident that government and transportation agencies will recognize the needs of our community and that we will continue to work together to find the best solution to the proposed air-rail link.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUILDING CODE AMENDMENT ACT (STORM WATER HARVESTING), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CODE DU BÂTIMENT (RÉCUPÉRATION DES EAUX PLUVIALES)

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 63, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 with respect to storm water harvesting / Projet de loi 63, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment en ce qui a trait à la récupération des eaux pluviales.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Dave Levac: This bill, if passed, will prohibit the chief building official from issuing a construction permit if the proposed building includes or is served by a storage garage, as defined in the act, and does not include a storm water harvesting system. It reduces the demand on water supply from the municipality, it allows for storage of rain water during urban water bans, and it minimizes property erosion and flooding. Importantly, storm water harvesting reduces treated water consumption, conserving electricity in the process. This bill will benefit homeowners, the environment and, most importantly, future generations of Ontarians.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EARTH WEEK

Hon. John Gerretsen: As we all know, this is Earth Week. At the heart of Earth Week is the fundamental realization that this planet is home to us all and we share a responsibility to care for it.

In the face of the immense environmental challenge of climate change, Earth Week is taking on more significance and importance every year. We know that climate change will affect every nation in the world, and we are moved to act not only for ourselves, for our well-being and health, but even more so for the sake of our children and grandchildren, people who have no say in the actions we take today but will inherit the results of those actions.

From young to old, Ontarians across our province are taking steps to help our environment during Earth Week and beyond. Our government understands that it's at the community grassroots level where involvement leads to real action and measurable results. That is why we are investing in the great work that is being done by Ontarians at the local community level. This year, we're providing $2.6 million to support 24 community-based greenhouse gas reduction projects across the province. The support is also coming from our community go green fund, a four-year, $6.6-million program. Every program is designed to meet the local needs of the community and to help people reduce their carbon footprint.

In honour of Earth Week, I'd like to highlight some of these programs today. Here in the greater Toronto area, FoodShare is developing a pilot project called Putting Our Best Food Forward. This project will result in the planting of organic school food gardens and a composting program to promote sustainable food practices in 10 primary and secondary schools across Toronto.

In Waterloo, Reduce the Juice is a youth-led community initiative to encourage vehicle owners to pledge their commitment to reduce idling, and surveys will measure action and greenhouse gas reductions. In Woodstock, Forests for Life is a community tree planting program for youth and developmentally challenged volunteers focusing on the importance of carbon sequestration and energy conservation through a healthy tree canopy. These are just a few of the community groups who are taking action and making a difference, and our government is proud to support them on behalf of the people of Ontario.

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In my own ministry we are dedicated to Project Green, with the goal of being the greenest government ministry, from using renewable energy through Bullfrog Power, to enhancing recycling efforts, to video conferencing, to purchasing more hybrid vehicles for our fleets; we are trying to lead by example. Since the beginning of our mandate, our government has made environmental stewardship a key priority. We have set ambitious targets for greenhouse gas reductions: 6% below the 1990 level by 2014 and 15% by 2020, and we're taking action. We passed the award-winning Greenbelt Act, which protects 1.8 million acres of land across the GTA. We have set out tough regulations and limits for the largest industrial sources of smog-causing emissions. We are making an unprecedented $17.5-billion investment in transit to help clean the air and encourage people to leave their cars at home more often.

Just recently, Premier McGuinty announced the creation of Ontario's Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which will provide $1.15 billion for companies, institutions and individuals to encourage the innovation and invention process for green technologies. We are working on many different funds to protect our environment. We have taken actions that some might say were difficult, if not impossible, but we did them because we think, and know, it's the right thing to do. We will continue to be aggressive and ambitious about our environmental stewardship.

On Earth Day tomorrow, I encourage all Ontarians to reflect on how they can, as individuals in their communities and in their businesses, do the right thing for our environment. Last Friday I had the opportunity to visit Rideau Public School in Kingston, and this morning St. Paul Catholic School, and I cannot tell you how impressed we all can be with the students' know-how about environmental stewardship. They are much more aware than we were at their age. Credit must go to the students, teachers, staff and their parents. When we all do our part, we build a brighter future for our earth and for our children's children.

SMOKING CESSATION

Hon. Margarett R. Best: Today, first of all I would like to take the opportunity to recognize Mr. Peter Goodhand, the CEO of the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario, who is in the east gallery today.

This morning I had the pleasure of participating with Mr. Goodhand and Smoke-Free Ontario partners in announcing the winners of the 2008 Driven to Quit Challenge. The Driven to Quit Challenge is a health promotion campaign, hosted by the Canadian Cancer Society, that encourages Ontarians to quit for the month of March with the support of a buddy. We are working closely with our partners, including the Ontario division of the Canadian Cancer Society, our several regional tobacco control coordinators and the province's 36 public health units.

This year we have had more than 26,000 participants. Our government has funded the Driven to Quit Challenge as part of the Smoke-Free Ontario strategy for the past three years. This is because tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario, and it is one of the toughest addictions to break. Every attempt to quit is an important, courageous step for smokers, and we applaud these successes. We are making progress. These latest figures tell a powerful story: Tobacco use is down more than 30%s ince 2003. Our success is a sign of what can happen when you build a true partnership between committed advocates and a committed government.

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act is an example of this shared commitment. The tobacco display ban, which comes into effect on May 31 of this year, will help smokers who are trying to quit by banning the display of tobacco products at points of purchase. There will be no more impulse buying triggered by promotional displays of tobacco. As the saying goes, "Out of sight, out of mind."

Just as important, the display ban is a critical step in protecting youth from being influenced by tobacco mar-

keting tactics. Selling cigarettes when you buy candy and milk only makes cigarettes seem normal to young people, and that is just plain wrong.

It is also wrong to force children to breathe second-hand smoke when they are helpless passengers in a motor vehicle. As the Premier announced, we have proposed legislation to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. If passed, it would prohibit smoking in motor vehicles with children present.

As the name suggests, the grand prize for the Driven to Quit Challenge is a car—not just any car, but one that symbolizes healthy choices: the environmentally friendly Toyota Prius hybrid. The lucky winner of that car is Dianna Watson from Copper Cliff, just outside of Sudbury. Today I had the pleasure to meet Diana, who advised me that three close family members died of lung cancer: her mother, her father and her brother. So she was especially proud to be able to quit smoking and to have had the resources to help her to quit.

The seven regional winners of the challenge, who won $3,000 gift cards, are: Richard Pare, Maureen Richardson, Kyle Lilley, Gary Ashbee, Tim Miller, Dale Gervais and Ian Maytum.

Since this is Earth Week and tomorrow is Earth Day, I am especially pleased to congratulate the winners as we celebrate healthy choices for Ontarians and for our planet—a choice not to pollute your body, a choice that reduces pollution of our environment and a choice that saves lives.

Congratulations should also go out to all the buddies. They were there for their for friends who were trying to quit.

Everyone who registered and took up this challenge should be congratulated. Just participating makes them all winners, because each attempt that a smoker makes to quit is a step in the right direction. Research tells us that it usually takes several attempts to quit smoking, and we will continue to support and encourage smokers to butt out. That is why in the 2008 budget, our government committed to a permanent retail sales tax exemption for nicotine replacement therapy to help Ontarians to quit smoking.

I would like the House to join me in congratulating all the winners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

SMOKING CESSATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the official opposition to the statement by the Minister of Health Promotion. At the top, I want to recognize the amazing work done by the Canadian Cancer Society. We take this time to applaud the society especially in the month of April, which is Daffodil Month.

We owe it to all the people in the province of Ontario to promote healthy choices, including smoking cessation. I'm just not sure where to go from here, because this minister, who has been silent when it comes to the protection of the health of young people in communities like Caledonia—I guess that's what she means by the statement "Out of sight, out of mind" that she just made.

In the minister's bio, it says, "In her capacity as Minister of Health Promotion, Minister Best will champion health and wellness for all Ontarians. It says "all Ontarians." Apparently, if you live near an illegal smoke shack on government-owned property, you aren't part of the "all Ontarians" that the minister claims to be responsible for. Apparently, if you are a parent of a child attending school near an illegal smoke shop, your child does not count as part of Minister Best's version of "all Ontarians."

1400

And here is the real issue: The minister can read prewritten statements and pose for as many photo ops as her car and her driver will take her to, but if this government and this minister are so driven to help people quit smoking, why are there illegal smoke shops throughout the province selling illegal tobacco products and not paying provincial taxes? And why on earth is this minister silent when asked why she is allowing these illegal, life-threatening products to be sold to schoolchildren?

This illegal smoke shop in Caledonia is happening on government-owned property. I just wonder if the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal is even aware. Is he collecting any rent? I wonder. The Minister of Revenue can't talk enough about how her officers have seized illegal products and fined convenience store vendors, but can't say a word when asked about the double standard when it comes to the enforcement of Ontario's revenue regulations.

As the opposition in this House, we have full confidence in the work of the police officers across Ontario. Where we don't have confidence is in the McGuinty ministers who say one thing and do another. I am amazed that these ministers can sit idly by and be silent and imperil the health of children in the name of political correctness.

So the Minister of Health Promotion has the nerve to stand in this assembly today and talk about being "driven to quit." It's clear, when it comes to being driven, that the minister is driven to do anything but answer questions and take on the real responsibility of her job.

EARTH WEEK

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of the Environment on behalf of my colleague Mr. Barrett, who is delayed today. I want to say how pleased I am to comment on Earth Day, even though we have had earlier-than-ever smog days in the province of Ontario this year.

I want to also congratulate all of the learning facilities, all of the elementary schools in particular, that are celebrating Earth Day. My three granddaughters go to the Marchmont Public School up near Orillia, and I can tell you that they have a phenomenal program for Earth Day each year as they celebrate environmental awareness.

But I think there are many questions, and I know, particularly in my riding, that I've got a lot of concerns

with some of the actions of the government and some of the inactions of the government. One of the things that doesn't seem to reach this House very often, though, and I'll point it out to the Speaker today, is the declining water levels in Georgian Bay, Lake Huron and Lake Superior. This is something that I hope all of us, no matter what level of government we're at or what jurisdiction, can start to address. That is a major concern to people, particularly around the lakes.

We talk about environmental education. In my riding alone we have the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre. They receive absolutely no money to manage over 3,000 acres of provincially owned land, and at the same time, they educate; approximately 20,000 students a year go to that particular facility. I hope that we can get some funding for that.

I applaud the government on the Lake Simcoe protection resolution and on the legislation. However, something that's important is that the federal government has come to the table with over $30 million to this point. I'm hoping that we can see matching funds come from the province and not have the two governments work in silos but work together to improve the quality of the water in Lake Simcoe. It has been a long time coming, but this last Parliament and this Parliament we've addressed water quality in Lake Simcoe.

Finally, I'm very concerned about the water-taking permit that is before the minister on site 41 in my riding. It's an issue we're concerned about, as we pump hundreds of millions of litres of water per year into Georgian Bay.

And I want to welcome everybody to the Elmvale Water Festival this year on August 16.

EARTH WEEK

Mr. Peter Tabuns: New Democrats join with Ontarians in celebrating Earth Day. In 2008, I wish we had better news for the present and for the future. I wish the McGuinty government were more interested in progress and reducing the provincial footprint on the planet than in obfuscation and photo ops.

The planet is facing an environmental crisis that will define generations. I'm speaking of climate change. Yet, despite New Democrats calling for the introduction of a plan detailing how reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will be achieved and detailing the funding that will be allocated to get the job done, there's only silence from the government benches.

Not long ago we came through an election, and during that election there was a leaders' debate in which Dalton McGuinty didn't mention the words "climate change" or "global warming" once—not once. So I suppose it's not surprising that we sit here today, the 2008-09 budget is behind us, and there is still no detailed climate plan from the government and no funding allocation to make it all happen.

Instead of plans to reduce greenhouse gas reductions, we're getting plans from the McGuinty government to increase greenhouse gases, such as their embracing of so-called energy from waste incinerators over recycling and extended producer responsibility provisions.

Studies show that per kilowatt hour of power produced energy from waste facilities produced 33% more greenhouse gas emissions than coal-fired generation.

What government could claim to be concerned about climate change and then turn around and embrace a technology that is dirtier than coal? Unfortunately for Ontario and the planet, that's what the McGuinty government has done.

SMOKING CESSATION

CESSATION DE FUMER

M^me^ France Gélinas: I want to add my voice to congratulate Dianna Watson from Copper Cliff, who won this year's contest. It is a little bit ironic that Mrs. Watson and her family have been on a citizens' committee in Copper Cliff to try to bring a community health centre to Copper Cliff. Hopefully, her luck will continue and we'll see a community health centre there too.

We all agree that smoking is harmful to your health, and we, the New Democrats, certainly support the good work of the Canadian Cancer Society to help people stop smoking. Strategies that encourage Ontarians to quit smoking are important. I have said, and I will continue to repeat, the more times you try to quit smoking, the higher your chances of success.

Le plus de fois que tu essaies d'arrêter de fumer, le meilleur sont tes chances de réussir.

But I must say that it is ironic that the Driven to Quit prizes are awarded the day before Earth Day. Why? Because Ontarians who have successfully quit smoking—we're not talking about people in the pre-contemplation stage, to use a little bit of health promotion lingo, but people who have gone through the stages and have reached the action stage, who have been successful in doing something that is extremely difficult. And what does the Ministry of Health Promotion give those people who are making real changes to live healthier lives? The Ministry of Health Promotion awards them cars and TVs—hardly the tools needed to live a healthy lifestyle. What a missed opportunity for the Ministry of Health Promotion to actually promote health.

It seems that over and over again, we're reminded that the Ministry of Health Promotion is hardly in the business of health promotion.

Last week, when questioned about the high number of illegal cigarettes sold in the province—37%, according to the Ontario Convenience Stores Association—and the fact that the smoking rates by First Nations people are the highest, the Minister of Health Promotion said, "Go visit the website stupid.ca." You'd think if the government really wanted to help Anishnawbe communities, they would work on the key determinants of health that lead First Nations people to smoke, instead of telling them to go to a website.

Also last week, we saw the Minister of Health Promotion stand by while dozens of pools in Toronto were

closed. You'd think that the Ministry of Health Promotion would figure out ways to keep sports and recreation facilities open. We know that the most effective way to prevent disease and fight obesity is by keeping people active.

The NDP has put forward a communities-at-play proposal which would provide much-needed financial support for sports and recreation. The plan is simple: If you build it, they will come.

Tommy Douglas said it best, that "the ultimate goal of medicare" is "to keep people well." I wish the Minister of Health Promotion would lead us to that goal.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member for Toronto Centre, in the east members' gallery: the grandparents of page Michael Thomas-Fulford, Lois and Douglas Thomas.

Also in the east members' gallery, on behalf of the member from Windsor West: Mr. Justice Douglas Phillips, and Melissa Phillips, a law clerk from the Ontario Court of Appeal.

1410

On behalf of the members from Don Valley East and Willowdale, we'd like to welcome Hamid and Soraya Mahmoudi, parents of page Ida, as well as Golnarjes Tirdad, grandmother of page Ida, in the east members' gallery. Also in the east members' gallery are Chris Jones and Michelle Seger.

On behalf of the member from Don Valley West, I'd like to welcome to the west public gallery the father and brother of page Adam Laskaris: Sam Laskaris and Michael Laskaris.

Guests of mine in the Speaker's gallery today: Ian, Ruth Anne and Ken McCallum from Elgin county.

Welcome everyone to Queen's Park today.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Before we begin question period, there are a couple points I wanted to raise with the members.

First, last week I indicated to the House that I would consult with the table on the issue of the introduction of bills and, specifically, the allowance of a brief explanation of purpose. I'd like to now take the opportunity to clarify the meaning and principle behind that proceeding.

The introduction and first reading of a public bill is intended to allow the bill to be received so that it may be printed and distributed to members who are yet to be familiar with its contents. Often, the title of the bill is insufficient in terms of shedding any light on what the bill is intended to do. For example, legislation requiring a certain speed limit on 400 highways might be simply entitled, "An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act."

The intent of the brief explanation is to provide a more specific indication of the purpose of the bill. It is not, however, the beginning of the debate on the bill. It should not contain any argument or justification; rather, it should outline in the most succinct terms what the bill will do. Any additional information, such as why the member's introducing the bill, who supports the bill or how it will benefit the citizenry, constitutes debate and is more properly part of the second reading stage of consideration.

Members are greatly aided in determining what the brief explanation of the purpose is, in that each bill contains on the inside cover an explanatory note. It is the essential contents of that note that may be shared with the House during introduction of bills.

It's my view that except in a case of an extraordinarily complex piece of legislation, the purpose of the bill can most often be explained in less than 30 seconds.

Members now have the benefit of this clarification, and I am certain that in the future they'll be mindful of the rules respecting the brief explanation of the purpose that attaches to the introduction of bills.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): A second issue I wanted to raise: It's interesting, at home or in the Speaker's office, the number of what I would call armchair Speakers who watch question period regularly, and who—and I thank them for that—will call or send e-mails offering advice to the Speaker in the chamber. There was an e-mail that I received last week. I'm not going to shed any of the details. Some of you may recognize some of this; many of you were copied on this e-mail. But there are just a few things from it that I want to highlight, because hopefully it will benefit all members, specifically in regard to thinking as we speak in this chamber. It's not so much for the people at home, because the people at home don't often hear the heckles and the side comments, but it's people who are visiting the chamber, whether it's in the galleries today or in any of the galleries. So I'm just going to read some excerpts from the e-mail. I'm not going to pass judgment or comment, but hopefully it will make each of us stop and think:

"I am writing to express my extreme disappointment at the behaviour of some MPPs during question period on" a certain date. On this day a delegation ... were present in the visitors' gallery to show their support.... The delegation was introduced by our MPP....

"This should have been a great moment for these students to be recognized in this fashion. It is unfortunate that one MPP chose to destroy this moment by heckling the students from the floor of the ... Legislature....

"As an individual who watches question period from time to time on television, I am aware that opposing MPPs regularly attack (verbally) and insult each other in the Legislature.... In addition many MPPs showed extremely disrespectful behaviour by engaging in loud conversations with colleagues as" the member "was making the introductions.

"This was clearly a bad civics lesson for our students and it actually reinforced some of the negative stereo-

types that exist about our elected officials and government in general."

I just leave that with the members.

I was just passed a note today from a member making comments about certain heckles that take place within the chamber, and I just ask that we be respectful of one another. Both sides have a job to do and I recognize that, but we also need to make sure that we set an example for those people who are in the galleries and set an example for those people who are watching at home.

The member from Welland?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speaker, with great respect, I want to thank you for your assistance in these matters and appreciate your addressing them in this style so that people have basically been forewarned and people aren't then embarrassed or caught short. I also look forward, of course, to the invocation of standing order 36(d); I await that enthusiastically.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Because I'm sure that the individual is watching, on behalf of the House to that classroom I'd like to extend an apology on behalf of all members.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. It has to do with a rather interesting poll which appeared in the media today, sponsored by your old friends Bensimon Byrne, the ad company that produced your infamous "I won't raise your taxes" ad. The poll indicates that 25% of Ontarians are worried that someone in their family will lose their job in the coming year, the highest number the pollster has seen since that newly minted Liberal Bob Rae was in your seat.

Premier, over the past three years you've consistently dismissed concerns from the official opposition that Ontario's families and businesses need meaningful tax relief. You are now hearing it from worried families through Liberal-friendly channels. Are you going to continue to ignore these very real concerns?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to receive the question, but I can't agree with the comments offered by my honourable colleague. We're very concerned about families and their outlook on the economy, and they have some real justification for concern at this point in time.

I was just asking the Minister of Finance if he saw last week's Economist magazine; I believe the title was "The US Economic Slowdown: Its Impact on the World Economy"—so the world is feeling what is happening south of the border, not just us here in Ontario, who happen to be one of its greatest trading partners.

I think where I disagree with my colleague is in terms of what we need to do in the face of this economic slowdown. He argues that we should put forward a one-point plan, which is simply to cut corporate income taxes on corporations that are profitable. We've got something more comprehensive, and I believe to be more effective. We're investing not only in tax cuts but, as you well know, in infrastructure, innovation, partnering with business, and investing in the skills and education of our workers.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The Premier says he's very concerned, but his comments seem to be a continuation of what I would describe—or at least some would describe—as an insensitive response to a recent media question about the state of the economy, when you stated, rather offhandedly, "This too shall pass."

Under your watch, since July of 2004 close to 200,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this province. Those are real communities and real families being impacted. Yet, in many ways you remain strangely serene; some would say, even detached. Premier, if that's not the case, when will you take meaningful action, address the tax burden and provide the leadership that worried families in this province deserve?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, there's a marked contrast in the approach the Conservatives would bring, had they the honour to serve Ontarians in government, and the one we ourselves are bringing on this side of the House. We believe it's really important to continue to maintain quality public services for Ontarians: their health care, their education, protections for the environment and so on and so forth. The tax cuts that the leader of the official opposition would have us adopt would lead to hospital closures, would lead to firing nurses, would lead to underfunding our schools, would lead to higher tuition and would lead to cuts to important services that families have to be able to count on.

I think life is more complex at the beginning of the 21st century in a global, knowledge-based economy than to say that you can approach a US slowdown with a one-point tax-cut plan. That's why we're investing heavily in the skills of our people. Beyond that, we're investing in tax cuts, infrastructure, innovation and in continuing partnerships with business. We think that's an effective, intelligent way to deal with this slowdown.

1420

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary? The member from Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Mr. Premier, if you won't listen to this side of the House and you won't listen to your pollsters, will you listen to Mr. Morris Bradley of Burlington? Mr. Bradley supports a family of four. In the last two years, he has twice lost a manufacturing job due to plant closures. Next month, after a long wait, he's finally going to have major surgery. When he gets out of the hospital he'll have no income, he'll have no benefits and he'll have no way to provide for his family.

Premier, what are you going to do for Mr. Bradley and his family? Your empty platitudes won't put food on his table.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The first thing we'll do is guarantee the best possible public health care for this individual, to make sure it's there for him.

The second thing we will do is continue to invest in the skills and education of our people. One of the pro-

grams that we've put in place—the first of its kind in Canada—provides for new training opportunities, long-term training opportunities, for up to 20,000 Ontarians who have recently lost their jobs.

It's not all bleak. Some 455,000 net new jobs have been created in Ontario since 2003. In this individual's case and others, we're proud to say that we have long-term training opportunities available, funding up to $28,000 worth of tuition, perhaps child care, transportation costs, housing costs, those kinds of things, because one of the challenges connected with this new economy is that we have about 100,000 jobs that are going begging today. A lot of those demand high skills, and that's why we're investing for the first time in a determined way in long-term training, especially for folks who have recently lost their jobs.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety. In the members' west gallery today are the parents, friends and family of 25-year-old Aju Iroaga. Aju, a 25-year-old engineering student, was recruited on the campus of McMaster University to work as a tree planter for the summer of 2006. He was last seen on May 15, 2006.

Aju's parents have lived with the grief of not knowing what happened to their son for more than two years. The OPP investigation is inconclusive. The Ministry of Labour has not done a full investigation. Aju's parents are appealing now to the minister to order a full investigation.

My question is this: Will the minister respond to the appeal of these parents today and order a coroner's inquest so that they might have closure and so that we might know the circumstances surrounding his disappearance?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Certainly my sympathy and our thoughts are with the Iroaga family. There is currently on ongoing police investigation taking place by the OPP. There is also a full coroner's investigation being conducted into this matter. I look forward to the results of those investigations.

Mr. Frank Klees: My concern with the OPP investigation is that it is passive. They have indicated that they will respond to new information. There's no indication that it is active. The Ministry of Labour has not investigated, although there are many workplace issues at stake here.

It has been two years. I would say to the minister that if this was his son—in fact, I say to all of us in this place: If it was our son who was missing and government has taken two years and still has not ordered a full investigation, would we be satisfied that justice has been done? So I would ask the minister to use the authority that is his to order an immediate inquest so that we can have these answers and ensure that tragedies like this will be prevented in the future.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: There isn't anybody in this House or anywhere else who didn't wish that the family had all the answers that they want. I'm confident that the investigation—it's a full investigation by the chief coroner's office which is under way under subsection 15(5) of the Coroners Act—will provide the information necessary for the coroner's office then to determine if an inquest into the disappearance should be called.

Mr. Frank Klees: This goes beyond this immediate case. The government is ignoring the appeal of the president and the vice-chancellor of McMaster University as well, who wrote to the minister and to the coroner's office asking for an immediate inquest, because the implication here is that students are being recruited in our colleges and on university campuses, and we want to be sure, students want to be sure, and parents want to be assured that they are being recruited to job sites that are safe.

I would ask this of the minister: To this point, he has refused to meet with the parents. Will the minister agree to meet with Mr. Iroaga following question period today so that this becomes more than just another file for the government? I would like the minister to hear directly from the parent. I would like then for the minister to take it upon himself to work with the parents to ensure that the right action is taken.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Just to clarify the question a little bit, I've never been asked to meet with the parents before, so let's put that on the record. Clearly, we have parents who are hurting. I would more than willingly meet with the parents after question period so that we can exchange in a way that is suitable to their needs, because at the end of the day, there is no one in here who doesn't have concern for the lack of closure for these parents.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Minister of Community Safety: Is the OPP covering up a botched investigation when it refuses to let Aju Iroaga's family see the OPP file on Aju's disappearance?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I have every confidence in the OPP. I don't believe for a second that there is a cover-up to a botched investigation. In fact, there is an ongoing investigation by not only the OPP but also the chief coroner's office.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Why didn't the OPP interview all of Aju Iroaga's coworkers after Aju vanished from that very remote worksite?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The member knows full well that operational matters of the OPP are not subject to ministerial involvement. I would suggest that we will ensure that that process always is in place. But at the same time as the OPP investigation, there is also a full investigation by the chief coroner's office.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The minister knows that there was a failure to comply with the section 10 notification requirements. Why did it take two years, then, for the coroner's office to commence its section 15 investigation, after evidence has dried up, washed away and been buried?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I think the important thing for everyone to know here is that there is still an open police investigation. There is a full coroner's investigation taking place. I look forward to the results of both of those investigations.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Early detection and treatment of children's mental health issues are the keys to avoiding huge health costs down the road. The latest budget, however, does precious little to address this.

Why did the McGuinty government essentially flatline the funding to Ontario's lead agency for the provision of children's mental health services?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Children's mental health issues are obviously of great importance to families touched by this, so that makes it important to us.

I think it's important to put this in a little bit of perspective. We actually ended the 12-year freeze in terms of funding levels for children's mental health which dominated the two governments prior to us. Since 2003, we have invested $106 million more in new funding; 10,000 more children are now being served.

There is more work to be done, but I think, given the facts—in particular, we put $106 million more in new funding; 10,000 more children are being served—I think we're making some real progress.

1430

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The reality is that the sector has certainly been long underfunded. In Ontario, only about one in five children is getting the mental health services that he or she needs. Local agencies in places like London, Niagara, Welland and Hamilton are forced to cut programs and services due to a lack of government resources at a crucial time when children's mental health needs are on the rise in this province. Why is the McGuinty government basically ignoring the crisis in these communities and across the province when it comes to children's mental health?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, together with our continuing commitment to health care—generally it's up, in terms of funding, $11.1 billion more: a 37% increase since 2003. In addition to funding more opportunities for children who are affected by mental health issues, we've also dramatically expanded tests for our newborns in Ontario. We are now funding insulin pumps for first time for young people. We are now funding vaccinations that were never funded in the past and that save families $600 per child.

Not only is our commitment to children's health issues to be found in new funding for mental health but also in a number of other areas, which demonstrates our commitment to public health generally but to children's health issues in particular.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think everybody in this room knows very well that now is the time to invest in these services because the costs going out, whether it's health care costs, whether it's education costs, whether it's criminal justice and youth criminal justice costs, simply go through the roof.

According to Dr. Rod Evans, the head of the child and youth program at McMaster Children's Hospital, Hamilton is one of the worst-serviced areas in all of Canada for children's mental health. A lack of specialized psychiatrists means Hamilton's children can wait over a year for the kind of help that they need. Suicides are up. Caseloads are up. Waiting lists are up. When will the McGuinty government's funding be up enough to serve the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know it's getting a little dated, but I think it's important to keep in mind that in 1993, the NDP government cut funding for children's mental health services by 5%. It was then flatlined throughout the Conservative government years. So I'm proud of the fact that we've brought significant new dollars.

The member is right: There is more work to be done, and she is right about this being an important issue for prevention of other illnesses and social challenges that are created over the long term. But we are making some real progress. We have 10,000 more children who are now being served. Last year alone, children's mental health received a 5%—that's another $24.5 million—increase in funding across the board. In our recent budget, we had another $2.5 million to fund 100 capital projects to support children's mental health services. There is work under way. But the member is right: There is more work to be done.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Premier. Premier, I want to address the standing order changes which your government is trying to ram through this House. In October 1999, comments were made about the changes that were made at that time, and I want to quote from some of the members in your party who were sitting in opposition.

The member from Thunder Bay–Superior North said: "I ... want to compliment all three House leaders.... I am pleased that there has been such co-operation and such understanding...."

The current Minister of Transportation said: "I want to commend the government House Leader and the other two House leaders for making an effort to reach a consensus...."

I say to you, Mr. Premier: These are not the remarks that we're hearing this time. There has been no attempt to reach consensus. Why have you refused to hold meaningful discussions on these very dramatic changes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Just to add to the voices on this subject, I want to add a quote as well: "You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock in the morning.... I think, if you had the sitting start in the morning

and finish at suppertime, it allows moms and dads and young families to be home more often with their family and to have the thing just a bit more family friendly. So I think it means you'd look more often to start in the morning"—the Legislature—"and have your day proceed so that you could use those hours and finish by suppertime." It was said in August of last year by the leader of the Conservative Party, Mr. John Tory.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I think the Premier was afraid to deal with the standing order changes which he's initiated. Personally, I'm disappointed. I would say to the House leader: You didn't respond to the question in any way.

I'm going to say to you again: Your current finance minister also said, "We were, through a course of sometimes difficult negotiations, able to come up with a package of compromises." That's what's missing here today: There were never any face-to-face negotiations. As you said, "I received a counter-proposal from both parties and provided a counter-proposal back." That's it. End of story. No discussion; no debate; no attempt to reach a settlement.

I ask you today, and I go back to the Premier, who's the leader of this party and should be prepared to defend them: Will you immediately refer these changes to a legislative committee so that we can reach a true consensus?

Hon. Michael Bryant: If we're going to talk about how changes ought to be made, I can assure this House that the government has not followed the route taken by the Conservative Party when they brought through changes in 1997. This was subject to how many House leader meetings? Zero. The initial vote to time-allocate this took place at midnight. Another vote took place on August 20, 1997, in order to pass those changes. The member who's asking the question was one of the people who voted in favour of the time allocation motion at midnight.

We did engage in discussions and we did talk at length in several meetings about how this ought to work. The debate will continue again today and then it will be referred to a committee over the summer.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

While the minister was in China last week for ribbon cutting and sightseeing, more manufacturing jobs were lost in Ontario. These job losses added to the 200,000 that we've lost over the past four years. Since media coverage was scant at best, could the minister tell us how many jobs we can expect will be created in Ontario as a result of her trip?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do appreciate the question. I know that this member from Hamilton is as concerned as this government that the people of Hamilton have a very bright future. I hope that that means he'll be very supportive of the number of initiatives that we have for the Hamilton area in the area of jobs.

As it relates to my trip, which I did just get back from this weekend, I can tell you that the trip went very well. It was exactly as we expected. We had some great meetings, both at a corporate level and a governmental level. We hope, as was the case with previous visits around the world where this government has offices, that it does result in jobs here in Ontario.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm glad she mentioned Hamilton. I was hoping for at least a few more specifics on those announcements. Since they're lacking, I would like to suggest a few specific things that the minister can do right here, right now, to protect and create jobs. An industrial hydro rate would be of enormous assistance to Ontario's hard-hit forestry, steel in Hamilton, and chemical sectors. A refundable manufacturing investment tax credit would also be helpful, as it has been in neighbouring provinces all over this great country. A real Buy Ontario transit vehicle policy that would require 50% content would be welcome in communities like Thunder Bay, Mississauga and Hamilton. Why does this government continue to refuse to introduce these measures?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: As you know, this government has embarked on a five-point plan to meet issues in the economy today. Many of our manufacturers in particular are struggling, due in large part to factors that we wish we could control but we can't. That compels us, as a government, to come forward with key initiatives to make a difference for companies now.

1440

That's why I'm hoping this particular member from Hamilton will in fact be in favour of the business education tax cuts that were already announced by this government, but he voted against those; the $190 million that were a part of the last budget, but this member voted against those cuts to business that could actually help—as a matter of fact, the $1.5 billion set aside for skills training for people who have to change jobs, potentially, into a whole new sector. We would expect this member from Hamilton, who should know better than most the trials and tribulations of manufacturing, to support those measures being delivered by this government and to support them time and time again. But you once again have disappointed the people of Hamilton.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Energy. I was pleased to see a local project highlighted in the Toronto Star today. Today, SkyPower and SunEdison will break ground near Kingston on the first of many solar farms that have been contracted under a standard offer program. I understand construction will begin this week on the 19-megawatt First Light solar park located just east of Kingston. Not only will the solar park provide enough power to supply 2,000 homes annually; it will bring us one step closer to shutting down our coal plants by 2014.

Minister, what are we doing to encourage investment in renewable energy in our communities and in our province?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I thank the member for Northumberland–Quinte West. I'd just say to all of us and the public that we have a 20-year plan on energy. It always starts with conservation. We're going to cut our demand by about 20% through conservation. But the second part is to double our use of renewable energy so that in 2025 we'll have almost 45% of our electricity produced by renewables.

This project that you talked about was one of the steps we took. We announced a renewable energy standard offer program designed to guarantee a price. That's what this program was all about. I'm pleased to say that the people of Ontario responded. We've achieved our goal in the first year, a goal that we set over 10 years. In other words, we thought it would take us 10 years to get it; we got there in one year.

I'm very pleased to say we will continue to accelerate that program. The only limitations are on transmission and distribution. We've got to make sure we've got that available. But it's a program that has been proven to work.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: The RESOP has helped make it easier for small renewable power producers in our communities, such as farmers, rural land owners and community groups, to sell their energy to the grid. It's great to see solar and wind farms creating investments in small communities across Ontario such as Stone Mills and Sault Ste. Marie. Not only do they contribute power to the grid, but renewable projects provide significant investment in our communities during their construction.

Our government has shown significant leadership in committing to close coal plants. Would the minister tell us the role new green renewable power will play in replacing coal plants by 2014?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: We will replace all coal production in 2014, and this program is helping us to achieve that. Again I say to the public that conservation is crucial, but on renewables, I'm pleased to say we now have—when we first came into office four and a half years ago, I think we had 15 megawatts of wind. Today, up and operating, we have 500 megawatts. We've signed contracts for another 1,400 megawatts of wind power.

So we are aggressively moving forward to double our reuse of renewables. That's an important criterion for being able to close coal production in 2014. As I say, we'll be restricted only by our ability to have distribution and transmission capabilities. Renewables are on track and an important part of the long-term solution for clean, reliable, environmentally sensitive energy in the province of Ontario.

NURSES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Minister of Health. Today, the Toronto Sun reported that an emergency room patient at Rouge Valley hospital grew frustrated after waiting hours for a bed. He entered the nurses' lounge, grabbed a knife and injured himself. This comes the day after the local representative of the Ontario Nurses' Association had met with the hospital president to express concerns about what effects the cutbacks on security the previous year were having on the safety of nurses.

As you know, Minister, this hospital and others are having to make further staffing cuts this year to eliminate their deficits. What guarantees can you as health minister make today to the nurses that the balancing of these budgets isn't going to impact their safety and security?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say first, in the circumstances particular to Rouge Valley, as I've had a chance to say several times in the House, that the speculation and spectre of layoffs is not the same as people actually having been laid off. The member will know that the local health integration network, working with the hospital, is engaged in substantial community consultation, which we think is an important opportunity for people from the community to let their views be known.

With respect to the issue of safety of nurses, our government has taken several steps in our first term in office which have enhanced the safety of nurses. We've installed thousands of ceiling-mounted bed lifts. We've introduced the precautionary principle. We have moved to the N95 masks. These are all in response to the concerns of nurses.

By way of supplementary, I'll be very pleased to let the honourable member know of the work that I'm engaged in alongside my colleague the Minister of Labour to further enhance the safety of the nursing workforce in Ontario.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: As you know, the article in the Sun was written by Linda Haslam-Stroud. She's president of the Ontario Nurses' Association. The concerns being expressed are hers on behalf of her membership.

We know that nurses are feeling stressed because of their increasing workloads, but also we hear about these increasing incidents of violence in the workplace. I say to you, today, Minister: The coroner's inquest into the workplace murder of Lori Dupont, a registered nurse, made a number of recommendations. What is your government doing to make sure that these recommendations are fully implemented? Give me the time lines and tell me what you're doing.

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say to the honourable member that in addition to initiatives that we've taken to date, we've also mandated the use of safety-engineered sharps in hospitals; that will be implemented on September 1 of this year.

As I said to the honourable member in my earlier answer, in our party's platform in the recent election, there was a commitment to work decidedly on behalf of and in co-operation with Ontario's nurses to look for ways in which the nursing workplace, and indeed all health care workplaces, can be enhanced from a safety perspective.

The coroner's inquest into the circumstances in Windsor highlighted a very, very sad day for all in health care and gives us very many lessons which we are carefully analyzing and reviewing to determine what the

most appropriate way would be to move forward. We will do that in co-operation with Ontario's nurses, and I would look forward to any opportunity where the honourable member might wish to discuss this matter further to receive her suggestions as we contemplate the way to go forward. We understand that we can make improvements to enhance further the safety of the workplace.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Will the Premier commit to providing 50% provincial operating funds for municipal public transit?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: As the member would well know, we made a commitment before the 2003 election as a government that we would share with the municipalities two cents of the gas tax. You know that the gas tax is 14.7 cents, no matter whether it's a dollar a litre or 50 cents a litre. Whatever it happens to be is what the provincial government gets. It is not an ad valorem tax. We decided that we would share with the municipalities those funds for transit purposes; that is, to enhance, to expand, to improve upon public transit in those municipalities.

This year, somewhere in the neighbourhood of $314 million of funding was transferred to the municipalities. In addition to that, you will know that our government made additional funding available in March of this year to municipalities because they were facing special challenges in regard to their transit systems. With this money, they've utilized that for very good purposes. This has allowed them to spend the money that they need on operations while we assist very significantly with the capital end of things.

1450

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Although I appreciate the technique of the minister for not addressing the question, I have to come back: When will you make that commitment and restore that funding—50%—for operating?

Hon. James J. Bradley: You would be aware, for instance—there's a note coming in here. It says, "Gas tax at tab 17 and TTC note at tab 39."

Hon. Gerry Phillips: He should know that.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yes, I should know this.

Let me say this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Speak to the question, please.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will definitely speak to the question. The question I'm speaking to is one where you will see the unprecedented investments being made by the provincial government in Move 2020. The area in which you have a specific interest in particular, that of the greater Toronto area, you will know that we have committed a plan that would involve the expenditure of some $17.5 billion, the largest in the history not only of Ontario, but the largest in the history—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Last Wednesday, you hosted, along with the Premier, the fourth annual Premier's summit on agri-foods. These Premier's summits, over the past four years, have provided excellent opportunities for farmers from across the province to sit down with our Premier and yourself to discuss the many challenges and opportunities that exist in the agricultural sector in this province.

The Premier has always been willing to listen to farmers, and our government has provided support for them in their time of need. Our government is on the right track in encouraging innovation in the agri-foods sector through the Premier's award for agri-food innovation, which is presented at the annual summit. The McGuinty government knows that Ontario farmers have made significant contributions to our economy through innovation, new market opportunities and value-added products. Since 2003, this government has also provided over $1.2 billion in farm income support programs.

Minister, what are some of the accomplishments that have been achieved at the Premier's summits on agri-food over the past four years?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I want to thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who's particularly interested in agriculture, I think maybe because the president of the OFA, Geri Kamenz, was a student of his. His former student should be very proud of him.

With respect to the summit, our government is very proud to be led by a Premier who is the first Premier in the province to ask, every year, the leaders from the agriculture industry to come to this place and bring their ideas and advice on innovation, in terms of how to make this industry sustainable going forward.

Last year, particularly, we received input from the strategic advisory committee made up of stakeholders. They told us that the five areas they wanted our government to continue to invest in are bioeconomy, organics, marketing and branding, reducing regulations and Buy Ontario.

Mr. Jim Brownell: Again to the minister: Your hard work and dedication in hosting these summits, along with the Premier, are very much appreciated by the farmers from my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and from across Ontario. They put the spotlight on agriculture in this province and allow to us keep track of the progress we have made and the steps we need to take as we move forward in helping strengthen the agricultural sector through innovation.

Our government has stepped up to the plate when farmers have needed us. We announced $150 million in the fall economic statement that was provided this spring in support of cattle, hogs and horticulture producers, who are facing the challenges posed by the high Canadian dollar and rising input costs. Our government also introduced a three-year risk management program for grain and oilseeds producers to give them more support and be in a better position to deal with the challenges ahead.

Minister, can you please tell this House about some of the highlights from last week's fourth annual Premier's summit on agri-food.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm sure the Premier would agree with me when I say that what has become the highlight of the summit is when the awards are presented, both the Premier's award and the minister's award. This is very important information about people from the province of Ontario.

Last week, the Premier's award was provided to William and Caroline Nightingale of B&C Nightingale Farms for their work in improving fresh vegetables. They are doing this with a new technology called tunnel tech. This is an innovation on a sand plain near Delhi, land that formerly produced tobacco.

The minister's award recipient was David Freeman and his family from Freeman Farms. They have developed a freeze-dry technique that makes their garlic product, particularly, more marketable. They have a state-of-the-art processing process, and they're being recognized around the world for the good work that they are doing in conjunction with the University of Guelph.

This is definitely a highlight of the Premier's summit, and we're very proud of the people who have been successful.

DEVELOPMENT FEES

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs: Today I want to talk about expansion. This expansion is not good news. It's about the expansion of the HDI. Over the past few days, native protestors have turned their sights on the Ancaster fairgrounds. The Ancaster Agricultural Society received a letter from Six Nations asking for a donation plus a $500 fee.

The city of Hamilton, according to the Spectator, has said the issue is not a municipal one. I quote the director of planning: "It's ... between the agricultural society and the HDI."

Minister, your government told homebuilders during work along the Haldimand tract that they're on their own—and that was just two days before Sam Gualtieri was almost beaten to death. Will you now intervene, or are fair boards in Ontario now on their own?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I think, as the member knows, the discussions between Haudenosaunee Six Nations, the province, the federal government and the local municipality do cover a broad range of issues, and are still under way.

The desire is to create a provincial side table that would allow for a whole host of issues to be addressed. I think it would be in error to imagine that every single individual would be speaking on behalf of Haudenosaunee Six Nations on issues such as that. I will continue to work with Chief McNaughton and members of the council, as well as the municipality and the federal government, to try and come up with solutions.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Minister, your government is talking with HDI, and I'm sure you feel you're making progress as they continue to shut down local economies, site by site. Again, according to the Hamilton Spectator, HDI says, with respect to the Ancaster fairgrounds, they're exerting their authority under the Nanfan Treaty of 1701 regarding hunting and fishing rights in southern Ontario, northern New York State, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan.

As you know, HDI feels their mandate now ranges beyond the former Haldimand tract to encompass, and I quote HDI's interim director in the Spectator, "the whole North American continent." Now I know that's a little out of your league, Minister, but in your deliberations with HDI, do you feel that are you progressing towards a meeting of like minds? Do you know about this treaty? Do you agree with HDI using the Nanfan Treaty to now justify protesting outside the Haldimand tract?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member knows that the main discussions take place with respect to land claims that have been filed with the federal government. Where there is an appropriate provincial role, we play that role. That covers land claims certainly that do not extend as far as the member has suggested with respect to some individuals, who have suggested that in fact the land claims are larger.

The history is laid out in the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784, which I believe the member makes reference to. It was particularly unfortunate that in debating this issue, the member saw fit to mock the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784, which was seen, I should tell you, by the community as a major insult and affront to that community.

Our approach, in fact, is to negotiate with the parties on matters in which we believe we can come to a resolution. We'll continue to do so.

1500

FLOODING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources.

Last week on Tuesday, in response to a question from my colleague the member from Hamilton Centre, you said that there were 4,000 people employed by the province of Ontario to monitor flood levels. Do you stand by that comment?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I actually said that there are 4,000 monitors, not people—4,000 monitors; 1,200 stations.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To my good colleague the minister of whatever, I do have the next question, and the next question is based on the Hansard.

The Hansard reads, "There are 4,000 monitors in 1,200 stations across this province. They work through the water monitoring station.... " Clearly, you were saying to this member that there were 4,000 people employed by the province of Ontario to monitor flood levels. Will you now come clean and tell this province how many people you actually employ, or were you misleading the House?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I withdraw.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: A monitor is a gauge as well as an individual. In this case, a monitor is a gauge, of which we have 4,000 deployed around the province at approximately 1,200 stations. That information is then fed through to the Peterborough surface water monitoring system, and then we go back to the conservation authorities and we give the information out to the different municipalities and regions.

If the member would like, I could give him the Webster's Dictionary definition of what a monitor can be.

SNOWMOBILING

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Tourism. The minister would know that snowmobiling is an important and significant recreational pursuit for thousands upon thousands of Ontarians and thousands upon thousands of visitors to this province. Snowmobiling is an important and significant pursuit, especially in my riding of Algoma–Manitoulin.

The success of this sector is largely influenced by the thousands of volunteers with the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs and the work they do to maintain over 40,000 kilometres of trails across the province. I'd like to ask the minister to tell us what the McGuinty government has done to support this highly valuable and entirely volunteer-based organization.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'd like to thank the member for Algoma–Manitoulin for the question. Everybody who knows the member understands what a wonderful champion he is for snowmobiling in Ontario.

We are coming into spring, and we're done with the winter season, but so much happens in the out-season in snowmobiling.

I'd like to recognize the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs for all the work they do. This important organization provides so much leadership and support for snowmobiling clubs across the province. Through snowmobile clubs, over 6,000 volunteers help make Ontario the premier snowmobiling destination in the world. This is why I announced last week to the OFSC that they will be receiving $3 million from the McGuinty government. This is going to bring jobs and benefits to communities across Ontario: to our rural communities, to our northern communities, all—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Over the years, approximately 20 members of this chamber have accompanied me on snowmobile trips across Algoma–Manitoulin.

I want to pay tribute to the many, many volunteers of the OFSC in my area, including Groomerboy from Dubreuilville, Luc Levesque, who does a tremendous job for us all.

I want the minister to tell us what the $3 million that you announced will do to promote snowmobiling and to help the volunteers do a good job, and give us some idea about the impact on the Ontario economy to come from snowmobiling.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Once again, I'd like to thank the member for the question.

Snowmobiling contributes $1.2 billion to our economy annually. This encourages job growth and economic prosperity across the province.

Our government committed to this investment in the fall, and we're following through on that promise. By providing this money at the end of the season, we're supporting the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs so they can maintain and repair their trails—that trail infrastructure is so important and it's so extensive: over 40,000 kilometres; the most in the world—to keep them in good shape for the upcoming season.

We announce this now to help keep snowmobiling at the front and centre of people's minds as they begin to plan for next winter's snowmobiling season and vacation season.

DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAMS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Premier. Despite numerous requests last year, both during the election and after the Legislature resumed, the Premier has refused to meet with Ottawa Police Chief Vern White regarding the near-crisis level of drug use, particularly of crack, in the national capital, our own backyard. Will the Premier be calling Ottawa Police Chief Vern White this week to discuss solutions to what is now a national embarrassment in our hometown, which is the drug problem on Ottawa streets?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm more than happy to meet with the chief, but I can tell you that I have assigned responsibility for this on the ground in Ottawa to Minister Watson. He's met with the chief, I think on at least three occasions now.

The chief has a very real concern, shared by many of us in Ottawa, and that has to do with the adequacy of treatment opportunities for young people who are affected by drug addictions. With that in mind, we came to the table with $25,000, and we are co-funding a study together with the city of Ottawa. We're waiting for that report, and on the basis of advice that will flow from the report, we look forward to laying out an action plan. But again, I know the chief has a real and genuine concern about this, as do I.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: With respect to the Premier, you are the MPP for Ottawa South. I appreciate the work that the member from Ottawa West–Nepean is doing, but he's not the Premier of Ontario, and he's not the chief political lead in this House. You are.

On March 17, I raised the need for a drug treatment centre in Ottawa in this House. Since then, a report has been released recommending the same. While this government's philosophy is simply to pass out crack pipes

and exchange needles, Ottawa police suggest we must prevent and rehabilitate before harm reduction and enforcement. They too support a drug treatment facility.

Again, will the Premier meet with Police Chief Vern White to immediately implement solutions to get crack off the streets in Canada's capital, and immediately commit to a residential drug treatment facility for eastern Ontario drug addicts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll extend this to Minister Watson.

Hon. Jim Watson: This is an important issue in our community, there's no question about that. This is the reason why, in my former capacity as Minister of Health Promotion, I secured the funding—one half of the funding for the study; we were the first at the table. The mayor of Ottawa and city council approved the second half of the funding. I've met, as the Premier indicated, on a number of occasions with the chief, as well as with Mayor O'Brien and Dr. Rob Cushman. As the member knows, the LHIN is taking the lead in putting together the report, and we anticipate having a report within the next couple of weeks at the LHIN board.

As Minister Smitherman has indicated on a number of occasions, as has the Premier, we're very much committed to ensuring that there will be a residential youth drug rehabilitation centre in the city of Ottawa. We want to get it right. We want to make sure we have the right plan for our community to deal with this terrible situation.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

M^me^ France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. The Minister of Transportation is currently renovating 23 highway service centres. Most highway restrooms meet disability codes and are accessible to people using a wheelchair. However, these restrooms do not meet the needs of adults with disabilities who are incontinent. Minister, will you agree to ensuring that adult-sized personal care areas and change tables are built in all 23 highway service centers that the Minister of Transportation is presently renovating?

Hon. James J. Bradley: We're not supposed to say they're good questions when you're in government—I can remember that over the years—but that's a good question. I really think that the issue that you've brought to the forefront is excellent.

We're going through a procedure now where we want to do complete renovations and substantial changes. This is exactly the time we can do that. When those services have not been available in years gone by, it's been more than an inconvenience. It is removing a right that people with disabilities have to services of this kind and other services that are available.

I want to assure the member that when we are looking at the criteria to be established for those who will be operating these service centers, the one criterion that she has mentioned will be included in that, and a second criterion she mentioned as well. So I'm glad you raised that, and those who will be answering the procurement papers that we put out should know that.

1510

M^me^ France Gélinas: I'd like to read you an e-mail that I received recently. It goes, "I have an 18-year-old daughter who is a quadriplegic. She is also incontinent. The problem we face everywhere we go is where to do her personal care. Baby change tables do not meet our needs. All we require is a long countertop five to six feet long in a private area."

With the service centre renovations under way, we have an opportunity to make highway washrooms more accessible and to make it possible for adults with disabilities to enjoy our great province and travel around. Will the minister agree to build adult-sized personal care areas?

Hon. James J. Bradley: In all of these circumstances, we want to be able to serve all of the citizens of the province of Ontario who would use these service centres. Again, I think the e-mail that you have read brings to our attention—and sometimes our society as a whole doesn't realize it, but it is extremely important to have these kinds of facilities available. You're right again. This is exactly the time we're able to do it, when we're putting out the requests for tenders—"tenders" is the wrong word; requests for proposals—in this particular case for the service centres. Not only the items that you've brought to my attention, but if you're aware of any other items that may be helpful in this regard, I would be more than—

Mr. Mike Colle: Some good food.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member mentions good food as well—but healthy food choices. We're trying to encompass as much of that as possible.

So I invite members to send suggestions to me. I thank the member for her suggestions in the House today.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. On Friday, I had the opportunity to join my colleagues the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in Thunder Bay for a joint federal-provincial funding announcement on affordable housing. As many of the members know, affordable housing isn't just a problem in big cities like Toronto or Ottawa. I have to tell you, it was a thrill for me to have the opportunity to meet at that individual event in Thunder Bay three of the recipients who received funding under this program.

Minister, can you please inform the Legislature about the affordable housing funding you announced in Thunder Bay on Friday?

Hon. Jim Watson: I was delighted to be in North Bay as part of the Northern Ontario Municipal Association—

Interjection: Thunder Bay.

Hon. Jim Watson: Thunder Bay—with my colleagues the Minister of Northern Development of Mines

and the Minister of Natural Resources. At an announcement in the morning, I was joined by Iain Angus, the chair of the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board, where we announced a $900,000 contribution as part of the affordable housing program, money that was reprofiled into the northern repair program.

I too had the opportunity, like the member who just asked the question, to meet with some of the homeowners who have benefited from this funding. It has given their homes new life and it has given these individuals from an economically challenged background new hope living in these beautiful new renovated homes, thanks to the affordable housing program.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you, Minister. The flexibility and additional funding are greatly appreciated by the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board. We know housing repairs are a much-needed facet of what needs to be done to improve affordable housing in the north. Past governments have underfunded affordable housing and we are just now starting to make up for lost time.

Minister, while we appreciated the announcement on Friday, we all recognize and acknowledge that more needs to be done. Can the minister please tell me what else our government will be doing for affordable housing in the north?

Hon. Jim Watson: Just prior to the budget, the Minister of Finance indicated that for the first time in a long time we've actually put a substantial amount of new money into a repair program—$100 million, in fact—and that was the single largest contribution of rehabilitation repair money in the history of the province of Ontario.

In the northwest, Kenora DSSAB received $488,000 of that; Rainy River DSSAB, $248,000; and Thunder Bay, $1.5 million. This will go a long way to repairing homes, social housing projects, in the northwest. I want to thank my colleagues from Thunder Bay, Mike Gravelle and Bill Mauro, for their lobbying and insistence that the northwest gets its fair share in this very important investment in public housing in the province of Ontario.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. As the health promotion minister, will you enforce the tobacco display ban at the Caledonia smoke shop on Argyle Street?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I refer the question to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Our government has a real strategy to combat illegal cigarettes. It's a three-fold strategy: The first strategy is the cessation strategy; the second strategy is the Tobacco Tax Act; and the third strategy is a very, very aggressive policing strategy, and that's been very, very successful. The OPP, on their own and in partnership with other forces, has been very, very successful at getting contraband cigarettes off the streets. We support that strategy. We support all three strategies and we ask you to support them as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. It's now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Provincial Animal Welfare Act calls for the Ontario SPCA, a private charity, whose objective is to facilitate and provide for the prevention of cruelty to animals and their protection and relief therefrom; and

"Whereas every inspector and agent hired and trained by this private charity has and may exercise any of the powers of a police officer; and

"Whereas this private charity does not answer to the Ombudsman or the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Ontario SPCA is not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and no external mechanism of accountability exists; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refused to investigate the desperate plea of 29 resigned directors demanding that the Ontario SPCA be stripped of police powers; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government proposes sweeping reforms to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act granting further extraordinary powers to the Ontario SPCA, including the power of warrantless entry;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to investigate allegations of abuse of police powers and charter violations by the Ontario SPCA investigators; and

(2) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to explore the need for an external mechanism of accountability for the Ontario SPCA; and

(3) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to ensure that proposed changes to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act do not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

I've signed this.

HOME CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU and the people of Toronto, Brampton and Etobicoke:

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care

delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;... "

So they ask the Ontario government:

"(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and give it to page Ida.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here from the people of Eglinton–Lawrence. It's to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles, in support of Bill 56.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas only police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

1520

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Ajax-Pickering hospital should have full funding for mental health, including beds;

"Whereas this would affect the mental health programs and mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering hospital;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Fully fund the mental health beds and programs at Ajax-Pickering hospital."

I certainly agree with this petition, and I'll affix my signature to it in support.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today, "Stop Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles—Bill 56," from citizens in the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas only police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Ajax-Pickering hospital should have full funding for mental health, including beds;

"Whereas this would affect the mental health programs and mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering hospital;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Fully fund the mental health beds and programs at Ajax-Pickering hospital."

I'll give it to Thomas to pass over to the table.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Helena Jaczek: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the citizens in the riding of Ajax–Pickering:

"Whereas the Central East local health integration network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas with the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

"Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future."

I'm pleased to support this petition, and will affix my signature thereto.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I'm supporting the petition, I'm affixing my signature and I'm sending it through Rheanna.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our spiritual and parliamentary tradition since it was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my name in full support.

HIGHWAY 138

Mr. Jim Brownell: While I know that measures are being considered for the highway in question, these petitioners have asked me to present this in the Legislature. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas provincial Highway 138 is one of the province's only two-lane roadways within the region and provides the main connection from the international bridge at Cornwall through Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry to Highway 401 and Highway 417. Speed and traffic volumes are of particular concern and may have been contributing factors in numerous collisions and fatalities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To urgently consider measures that will address the serious public safety and traffic hazard concerns on provincial Highway 138."

I shall send this to the clerks' table.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

"Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future."

It's signed by a substantial number of constituents from my colleague's riding of Simcoe North, and I'm pleased to support it as well.

DISABLED PERSONS PARKING PERMIT PROGRAM

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there currently exist problems of exposure to theft and the weather when displaying a disabled person parking permit on a motorcycle while parked in a disabled parking space;

"We, the undersigned, petition our members of Parliament to promote the development of a special, fixed permit as proposed by the Bikers Rights Organization, for use by disabled persons who ride or are passengers on motorcycles, even if that requires an amendment to the Highway Traffic Act."

I agree with this petition. I will sign it. I thank Michael Warren and the Bikers Rights Organization for their assistance.

STRANDHERD-ARMSTRONG BRIDGE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I have a very important petition for the people of Nepean–Carleton.

"Whereas the close-knit communities of Barrhaven, Riverside South and Manotick combined have a total population of well over 50,000 people; and

"Whereas the only link between Barrhaven and Riverside South across the Rideau River is a lengthy commute either across the congested Hunt Club bridge or through the village of Manotick, which cannot sustain the traffic; and

"Whereas the city of Ottawa has identified the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge as a viable alternative to the traffic congestion created at the Hunt Club bridge and on Bridge Street in Manotick; and

"Whereas the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge is a much more environmentally sustainable option for south Ottawa commuters across the Rideau River than either the commute through Manotick or via the Hunt Club bridge; and

"Whereas the city of Ottawa has identified the cost of the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge, including all ramps, road widening and bridge work, at $105 million; and

"Whereas the city of Ottawa has requested that a third of that funding, approximately $35 million, be provided by the Ontario Liberal government, and further, that one third from the federal government has already been committed; and

"Whereas the previous Liberal MPP for the community of Riverside South did not act on the need for this bridge and the current Liberal Premier of Ontario has refused to enter into negotiations with the city of Ottawa over sharing the cost of the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge;

"The residents of Barrhaven, Riverside South and Manotick call on Dalton McGuinty to build the bridge now."

I agree with this petition and I'll sign it. I will present it to our page Lucas.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today.

"Children and Smoke-Free Cars—Support Bill 11

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

"Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

"Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support 'legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present'; and

"Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico, and South Australia recently joined several jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and

amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under."

I agree with this petition and I will affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bryant.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that the standing orders be amended as follows:

Standing order 2 is amended by deleting the definitions of "Sitting day" and "Sessional day" and substituting the following:

"'Sessional day' means any day on which the House meets."

The word "sitting" in standing orders 37(b), 38(i), 42(c), 58, 69(b), 69(c), 97(d), 106, 113, 116 and 134(a) is replaced with the word "sessional".

Standing order 4(c) is deleted and the following substituted:

"4(c) At the commencement of every Parliament, or from time to time as may be required, the House shall appoint 3 Deputy Chairs of the Committee of the Whole House, to be known respectively as the First, Second and Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House, any of whom shall, in order of precedence, whenever the Chair of the Committee of the Whole House is absent or otherwise unable to act, be entitled to exercise all the powers vested in the Chair of the Committee of the Whole House including those powers as Deputy Speaker."

Standing order 5 is amended by deleting the number "2" and substituting the number "3" and by deleting the number "4" and substituting the number "5".

Standing order 6(a)is amended by adding the following clauses:

"(a.1) With notice, the government House leader may propose a motion to extend the hours of meeting during the last 8 sessional days in the fall and spring sessional periods provided for in clause (a), and during any extension thereof.

"(a.2) Such motion may stipulate that the House shall meet, as the case may be,

"(i) Between the hours of 6:45 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., or

"(ii) Between 6:45 p.m. and another specified time not later than midnight, or

"(iii) Past the adjournment time set out in clause 8(a) and continuing to a specified time not later than midnight.

"Such a motion may apply to one day or to more than one day and, in the latter case, shall specify whether subclauses (i), (ii) or (iii) apply to different days. The question on such a motion shall be put forthwith and without amendment or debate. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, the division bell shall be limited to 5 minutes."

Standing order 8(a) is deleted and the following substituted:

"8(a) The weekly meeting schedule for the House when it is in session shall be:

"

Day	Time	Proceeding
Monday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day
	10:45 a.m.	Introduction of visitors Oral questions
	Following oral questions	Petitions
	Following petitions	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Deferred votes
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	5:45 p.m.	Adjournment

"

Tuesday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day
	10:45 a.m.	Introduction of visitors Oral questions
	Following oral questions	Petitions
	Following petitions	Recess
	3 p.m.	Routine proceedings:

		Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Deferred votes
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	5:45 p.m.	Adjournment

"

Wednesday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day
	10:45 a.m.	Introduction of visitors Oral questions
	Following oral questions	Petitions
	Following petitions	Recess
	3 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Deferred votes
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	5:45 p.m.	Adjournment

"

Thursday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day
	10:45 a.m.	Introduction of Visitors
		Oral questions
	Following oral questions	Petitions
	Following petitions	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Deferred votes
	Following routine proceedings	Private members' public business
	Following private members' public business	Orders of the day
	5:45 p.m.	Adjournment

"

Standing order 8(d) is deleted and the following substituted:

"8(d) The House shall not meet during the week prescribed by the regulations made under the Education Act for the school holiday in March or on New Year's Day, Family Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Victoria Day, Canada Day, the day fixed for a civic holiday in August, Labour Day, Thanksgiving Day, Remembrance Day, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. When Canada Day falls on a Tuesday, the House shall not meet the preceding day."

Standing order 9 is deleted and the following substituted:

"9(a) Except as provided in standing order 6(a.2)(iii) and in standing order 37, at the points each day when the House arrives at a recess or adjournment, as set out in standing order 8(a), such recess or adjournment shall, without motion, be ordered from the chair.

"(b) If on any day the House has not completed its morning proceedings by 12:30 p.m., the Speaker shall interrupt and immediately recess the House until routine proceedings.

"(c) At the points each day when the House arrives at a transition from orders of the day to another proceeding as set out in standing order 8(a), the Speaker shall adjourn the matter then under consideration and shall call the next proceeding.

"(d) Except in the case of motions to adjourn the House or the debate, the Speaker shall cause any recorded division required upon any proceeding held during orders of the day on any morning to be deferred to the routine proceeding 'Deferred votes' on that same day.

"(e) When the House adjourns, the members shall keep their seats until the Speaker has left the chamber."

Standing order 11(e) is deleted.

Standing order 24 is deleted and the following substituted:

"24(a) Except where otherwise expressly provided by the standing orders, or by unanimous consent, no member shall speak in the House for more than 20 minutes.

"(b) Notwithstanding clause (a), the first speaker for any recognized party in the House may speak for not more than 60 minutes in the following circumstances:

"(i) debate on second reading of a government bill;

"(ii) debate on third reading of a government bill;

"(iii) debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne;

"(iv) debate on the budget motion;

"(v) debate on any other substantive government motion.

"(c) Notwithstanding clause (a) no member shall speak for more than 10 minutes after 7 hours of debate on second or third reading of a government bill.

"(d) At any time during a debate governed by this standing order, a member then speaking may divide his or her time among a member or members of his or her party. Such speeches shall be given consecutively without rotation among the parties and shall be deemed to be a single speech for the purposes of standing order 25.

"(e) In any debate where the available time is apportioned equally among the recognized parties, the speaking time limits on individual members shall not apply."

Standing order 25(c) is deleted and the following substituted:

"25(c) debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne, but no such questions and comments shall be allowed following the speeches of the mover and the seconder of the motion for the address, or the speeches of the members speaking first on behalf of the official opposition and the other recognized opposition parties."

Standing order 30(a) is deleted and the following substituted:

"30(a) The routine proceedings are comprised of the following in the order that they appear under standing order 8(a):

"Members' statements

"Reports by committees

"Introduction of bills

"Motions

"Statements by the ministry and responses

"Deferred votes

"30(a.1) In addition there shall be further proceedings called 'Introduction of visitors,' 'Oral questions' and 'Petitions'".

Standing order 30(b) is deleted and the following substituted:

"The time allotted for routine proceedings each day shall not exceed 1.5 hours. At the end of that time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the routine proceeding currently occupying the House, and any deferred votes, and immediately call orders of the day."

Standing order 34 is amended by striking out "9" in the third line and substituting "6(a.1)".

The following new standing order is added:

"35.1 Any member who wishes to have guests recognized shall provide the relevant information about the guests to the Speaker at least one hour prior to the commencement of oral questions each day and, at the Speaker's discretion, such guests shall be introduced under the proceeding 'Introduction of visitors'. It is out of order for any other guests to be introduced by any member."

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Standing orders 37(b) and (e) are deleted and the following substituted:

"37(b) Where notice has been given and reasons filed, as provided in clause (a), at 5:45 p.m. on any Tuesday or Wednesday, the Speaker may deem that a motion to adjourn the House has been made, whereupon the matter in question may be debated for not more than 10 minutes, 5 minutes to be allotted to the member raising the matter and 5 minutes to the minister or to his or her parliamentary assistant to reply if he or she so wishes. No more than 3 such matters of which notice has been given and reasons filed shall be debated on any single sessional day. At the conclusion of such debate or debates the Speaker shall deem the motion to adjourn to be carried and shall adjourn the House to the next Sessional day.

"....

"(e) When the House continues to meet past 5:45 p.m. on a government motion as provided in standing order 6(a.2)(iii), the adjournment proceeding under this standing order shall not apply."

Standing order 37(f) is amended by deleting the words "the next sessional day" in the 5th line and substituting "6:45 p.m."

Standing order 38(b) is deleted and the following substituted:

"38(b) A member may present a petition in the House during the proceeding 'Petitions'. The member may make a brief statement summarizing the contents of the petition and indicating the number of signatures attached thereto."

Standing order 41(a) is amended by deleting "6 sessional days" and substituting "12 hours".

Standing order 42 is deleted and the following substituted:

"42(a) In each of the 2 periods provided for in standing order 6(a), there shall be 5 sessional days to be known as opposition days.

"Opposition day debates:

"(i) Shall be limited to one per meeting week;

"(ii) Shall be designated to take place on either a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon;

"(iii) Shall be distributed among the recognized opposition parties in proportion to their membership in the House;

"(iv) Shall be taken up upon the commencement of orders of the day in the afternoon on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, as the case may be, the time available being apportioned equally among the recognized parties in the House; the time for a reply by the mover of the motion shall be included in the time apportioned to the party of which the mover is a member;

"(v) Shall be limited to 2 hours if held on a Monday;

"(vi) Shall be prohibited during the last 8 sessional days in each of the 2 periods provided for in standing order 6(a), and during any extension thereof.

"Opposition day motions:

"(i) Shall be printed on the Orders and Notices paper of the last sessional day of a week, and setting the day in the following week for its consideration;

"(ii) Shall contain the text of a non-amendable motion to be debated;

"(iii) Shall indicate the minister of the crown to whom it is addressed;

"(iv) Shall not be a motion for second or third reading of a bill;

"(v) Shall not be considered on any day on which the Minister of Finance has given notice of his or her intention to present the budget;

"(vi) Shall not be a motion of want of confidence in the government.

"(b) If more than one notice of an opposition day is filed on the same Wednesday, the Speaker shall select which one will be considered.

"(c) After 2 hours of debate on an opposition day held on a Monday, or at 5:35 p.m. on an opposition day held on a Tuesday or Wednesday, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and put the question without further debate. If a recorded vote is requested, the division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes. Such vote may not be deferred."

Standing order 43(b) is amended by deleting "5:50 p.m." and substituting " 5:35 p.m."

Standing order 45(a) is deleted and the following substituted:

"45(a) Motions to adjourn the House or the debate do not require notice, but a motion to adjourn the House may not be moved until following routine proceedings, except upon unanimous consent of the House."

Standing order 45 is amended by adding thereto the following paragraph:

"45(c.1) When a motion for the immediate adjournment of the House and a motion for the immediate adjournment of the debate have been defeated neither such motion shall again be made by the same member in the course of the same debate."

Standing orders 46(b) and (c) are deleted and the following substituted:

"46(b) 2 hours of debate, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, shall be allotted to debate on the motion, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate or amendment put every question necessary to dispose of the motion. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes."

Standing order 46(d) is deleted and the following substituted:

"46(d) A time allocation motion may not be moved until second reading debate has been completed or 6.5 hours of debate have taken place on second reading consideration of any government bill or on a substantive government motion. Upon completion of 6.5 hours of debate, or when the member who has the floor at that point has completed his or her remarks, the Speaker shall deem the debate to be adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise."

Standing order 57(a) is amended by adding the following:

"(a.1) On the day designated for the presentation of the budget, the Speaker shall recess the House immediately following routine proceedings until 4 p.m., except that if routine proceedings have not been completed by 4 p.m., the provisions of standing order 30(b) shall apply.

"(a.2) In any week when the budget is presented on a Thursday the weekly meeting schedule of the House shall be altered such that private members' public business will not take place in that week."

Standing order 57(b) is deleted and the following substituted:

"57(b) There shall be 8 hours allotted to the debate on the budget motion and any amendments thereto, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate or amendment put every question necessary to dispose of the budget motion. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, the division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes."

Standing order 62(d) is deleted and the following substituted:

"62(d) There shall be an order for concurrence placed on the Orders and Notices paper for each of the estimates reported from the committee. There shall be 2 hours, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, allotted to the debate on the orders for concurrence, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate put every question necessary to dispose of the order for concurrence in supply for each of the ministries and offices named in the committee's report. No amendment to any question may be moved. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, all divisions shall be stacked, and there shall be a single 10-minute division bell."

Standing order 63 is deleted and the following substituted:

"63. Adoption of orders for concurrence shall constitute an order to bring in a supply bill founded on the resolutions contained therein, and founded on the resolutions contained in the deemed concurrences made pursuant to standing orders 60 and 61. 2 hours, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, shall be allotted to the debate on the second reading stage of the supply bill, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate or amendment put all questions necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill. A supply bill given second reading shall be ordered for third reading, and the order for third reading shall then immediately be called and the Speaker shall put the question forthwith without further debate or amendment, no deferral under standing order 28(h) being permitted. In the case of any division under this standing order, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes."

Standing orders 66(b) and (c) are deleted and the following substituted:

"66(b) 2 hours, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, shall be allotted to debate on the interim supply motion, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate or amendment put all questions necessary to dispose of the motion. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, the division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes."

Standing order 79 is amended by adding the following clause:

"(b.1) No government bill shall be called during orders of the day on both a morning and afternoon meeting of the House on the same sessional day without unanimous consent."

Standing orders 96(a), (b) and (c) are deleted and the following substituted:

"96(a) 2.5 hours shall be allotted to the consideration of private members' public business on Thursdays, apportioned equally among 3 items of business as follows:

"(i) 12 minutes for the member moving a motion;

"(ii) A period of 12 minutes to be allotted in rotation for a representative or representatives of each of the recognized parties in the House. The mover of the motion may speak a second time during the time provided for a representative or representatives of the party of which he or she is a member;

"(iii) 2 minutes for a reply by the member moving the motion;

"(iv) The Speaker has the discretion to permit an independent member to speak for up to 5 minutes on the motion of another private member. In exercising his or her discretion, the Speaker shall have regard to the opportunities that members of recognized parties have to participate in debate on other members' motions. An independent member shall give the Speaker notice of his or her intention to participate in the debate."

Standing order 96 is amended by adding thereto the following paragraph:

"96(d.1) Subject to subsection (g), members may exchange places in the order of precedence on the ballot list by providing to the Clerk of the House written notice of their arrangement to this effect, such written notice to be duly signed by the House leaders of the affected members and to be provided by 5 p.m. on the Thursday of the week preceding the week in which the item of business is to be considered."

Standing order 96(e) is deleted and the following substituted:

"96(e) When the time allotted for the consideration of private members' public business has expired, the Speaker shall put all questions to the House. Divisions under this standing order shall be deferred and taken in succession. In such cases, the division bells shall be limited to 5 minutes. The House will continue to meet for the consideration of private members' public business until the necessary votes have been completed.

"(e.1) If consideration of private members' public business under this standing order is concluded before the expiry of the allotted 2.5 hours, the Speaker shall suspend the House for the balance of such time before putting the questions to the House."

Standing order 106(a) is deleted and the following substituted:

"106(a) Standing Committee on Justice Policy

"106(a.1) Standing Committee on Social Policy"

Standing order 106(g) is deleted and the following substituted:

"106(g) Standing Committee on Public Accounts which is empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the report of the Auditor General and the public accounts, which documents shall be deemed to have been permanently referred to the committee as they become available; and"

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Standing order 106(h) is amended as follows:

By deleting the words "section 12 of the Regulations Act, and having the terms of reference as set out in that section, namely" in the 6th, 7th and 8th lines of the first paragraph and substituting the words "section 33 of part III (Regulations) of the Legislation Act, 2006, and having the terms of reference as set out in that section, namely: to be the committee to which all regulations stand permanently referred; and";

and

By deleting the words "section 12(3) of the Regulations Act" in the 2nd and 3rd lines of the last paragraph and substituting "section 33 of part III (Regulations) of the Legislation Act, 2006".

Standing order 109(a) is amended as follows:

By deleting the words "clauses (a) and (b)" in the first line and substituting "clauses (a), (a.1) and (b)".

Standing order 124(a) is amended as follows:

By deleting the words "standing order 106(a) or (b)" in the 2nd and 3rd lines and substituting "standing order 106(a), (a.1) or (b)".

At 12:01 a.m. on the first Monday following adoption of this motion, the standing orders as amended shall come into force on a provisional basis until 11:59 p.m. on

the fourth Friday, following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008.

The provisional standing orders shall be deemed to be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, which is authorized to conduct a review of the standing orders during the 2008 summer adjournment of the House. The committee shall present its report to the House containing its opinions, observations and recommendations on the standing orders of the assembly no later than the first Thursday following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008.

Any government substantive motion to extend or permanently adopt the provisional standing orders, and any amendments thereto, shall be called for debate no later than the third Thursday following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008. The debate on such motion shall be limited to 1 hour, to be apportioned equally among the recognized parties, at the end of which time the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the motion.

The Clerk of the House is authorized and instructed to print a revised and re-numbered edition of the standing orders, integrating the provisional standing orders and making any necessary amendments in consequence thereof.

Is it any wonder, Mr. Speaker, this should be broadcast on the Web?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bryant has moved government notice of motion number 59. Mr. Bryant?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sharing my time with the member for Huron–Bruce.

I appreciate, for those aficionados of legislative procedure, that in fact the reading of the full standing orders amendment is required; either that or this is a bad April Fool's joke being played late on me, but the Clerk assures me that's not the case. I appreciate people's patience also in allowing me to read it in as quickly as possible. It's hardly self-explanatory, and that's exactly why we're here debating it today, in addition to the debate that takes place through question period itself.

These changes were proposed in February of this year and the proposal was initially provided by way of a letter to the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the New Democratic Party of Ontario, as well as the House leaders. It was signed by the Premier and myself on February 10, and it laid forth, in general terms, a proposal to make changes to the standing orders, something that had been contemplated post-election, in part by efforts made by the official opposition to make changes not only to the standing orders, but also to what one might call the legislative infrastructure, the way in which the Legislative Building and the precinct worked.

Issues were raised by opposition members with respect to the need for daycare facilities, even something as straightforward and obvious as a high chair. These issues, it was agreed upon unanimously, would be addressed by a committee with representation from all parties, and they would address not the standing orders but in fact all of the other infrastructure issues, you might say, that would eventually have to be considered by the Board of Internal Economy as well as this Legislature.

The standing orders, on the other hand—it was very clear, in my view, in the motion, and it was certainly clear in the understanding amongst the three House leaders—were a matter that would provisionally be considered and discussed by the House leaders and would then be brought to this Legislature for debate.

The response of the February 2008 letter was, amongst other things, a desire for the House leaders to get together and have discussions. My experience, without any question, in those House leaders' meetings was that we were having discussions, that we were trying to find consensus. It was at some point acknowledged that there were going to be differences between the government approach and the opposition party's approach.

I will say, and I'll have an opportunity to speak to this specifically, that the House leaders discussions that took place around these standing order amendments were substantially—I would even say radically—more fulsome than the previous standing order amendments of this type. The previous standing order amendments brought by the Conservative government, in fact, involved no discussions by the House leaders, and, as was covered in the media at the time, involved what many considered to be—well, let's just put it this way: a contrast to this. There was no letter to the leaders. There was no discussion amongst House leaders. There was a motion tabled at 5 p.m. in the afternoon, a midnight vote, and then in August, a time allocation motion passed by many members who were in the official opposition expressing concern, as is their right, about the process that has taken place today.

In order to try and confirm as best one could the efforts that had been made by the House leaders, I wrote to the House leaders, in a letter dated April 16, and laid out the changes that had been made to the initial proposal at the behest of the recommendations made by the official opposition and the third party. The changes were quite significant. In particular, 9:30 a.m. had been the original proposed start time for question period, and the standing orders that have been presented in this House see a 10:45 start.

If this motion passes, there would be a spring trial of this new plan, this new set of rules, and then it would be considered by a standing committee over the course of the summer with a report back to this House.

The proposal would, if passed, eliminate evening sittings except for the last eight sessional days of a sitting. The point of that was not to suggest that there will be evening sittings in the last eight days; on the contrary, it has got to be the exception. In fact, I would bet that no matter who's in government, all eight days will not be used. It would be my hope that none of them would be used, but the government of the day, no matter who the government is, has got to have some flexibility at the end of a session in order to address matters that just have not been completed, in order to do the people's business. But

the point of that provision was to guarantee, subject to unanimous consent by the House, that there would be no night sittings, and that is a crucial part of these changes.

Under the revised proposal, if passed, a bill could not be passed in one day without all-party consent. Under the original proposal, there was some argument as to whether or not, if you added up all of the hours of debate, a bill could be passed in a day, which is something that happens only where there's consent by the House to do so. On rare occasions, where there is consent—matters of either public urgency or for other reasons—a bill gets passed in a day. It very rarely happens. It's probably happened a handful of times or two handfuls of times over the past nine years that I've been here. It is very rare, and, more importantly, under these rules, it certainly cannot take place.

Let's begin by acknowledging that there have been changes to the way in which this Legislature works, and changes to question period in particular, over the years. Real historians will speak to this certainly far better than I. I know members of this House will be able to speak to this who have served longer than I. Questions, for example, were always submitted in writing up until the 1960s. It's only been since the 1960s that there has been an oral question period. So I must say, the suggestion that this changes centuries-old parliamentary tradition—I would say no; it actually marks, in my view, an evolution. The opposition will say "a devolution."

1600

Question period is still the longest question period in Canada, maybe in the Commonwealth—certainly in Canada. In the UK, questions are still sent in writing. In the late 1970s, question period was extended from 45 minutes to an hour, and by the 1980s legislative question period shifted to sometime between 1:45 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. There has been a lot of discussion about this movement of question period from this 1:45 range to the 10:45 range. It is, firstly, consistent with the approach that we are proposing here in this motion that the hours of legislative debate better resemble the working hours of most Ontarians. Certainly all members of this House are working early in the morning until late at night in almost all cases and on many days. But in the Legislature, while there are people here working very hard, doing a wide variety of things, in terms of MPPs conducting legislative business, question period, petitions, debate in this chamber, that doesn't happen until 1:30 and on Thursdays from 10 until noon to address public members' private business.

What that means is that when people come in here at 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 11 a.m. or 12 or 1 p.m. as part of a tour—and I've seen this. Anybody who has been in the Legislature at that time or been a part of the tour, they will be brought in here and they'll say: "The Premier sits there. The Speaker sits up there." You have to imagine—here you are, it's 10 a.m.—how the Legislature works. Instead, someone will come here at 9, 10 or 11 or at 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, and they won't have to imagine. They'll see the Legislature working at that time.

In contrast, the evening sittings have become increasingly abysmal not only in content and, one might say, quality of the debate, but also I think in terms of decorum as well. Nobody from the press gallery, to my knowledge, regularly covers the evening sessions. I'm not aware of it. I certainly stand to be corrected. You can expect that while there is debate during the morning, as is the case during the afternoon, you will have media coverage. Yes, some people watch the evening sittings. I know that. Similarly, some people will watch, if this passes, morning sittings as well.

We're expanding the amount of time available for debate. I would submit that this is a good thing: more debate in this Legislature, more opportunity to debate government bills, private members' public business, as well as resolutions, opposition day motions—all of that has been extended. Private members' public business is extended by adding an extra bill, resolution or motion. Right now, it's two a week. It will go from two to three a week. In addition to the increase in private members' public business, there is an increase in debate as well.

The idea of having the hours match the working hours of Ontarians was actually something that was raised by the leader of the Conservative Party, Mr. Tory, in remarks he made, you might say, during the election; it was the end of August, during our pre-election time. He made the case—I'm not going to read the quote again; I read it in question period. He said that it just makes sense. We should have working hours. It's going to match the hours of most people, the point being, I suppose, that not only does it make the Legislature more accessible to people, but it also allows the Legislature to operate at times that most Ontarians can relate to. It makes it more accessible. It makes this place not seem as if it is foreign or different in terms of its operations compared to the working hours of most people, and part of that was reflected in Mr. Tory's comments. In the discussion that took place immediately after the Premier brought forward his proposal in early February, one of the opposition members said, "This is the government thinking outside the box. This is positive."

The criticism with respect to the 9 to 5:45 hours—I say to the member, we're going to get there—the criticism, thus far, has been a level of, I would say: "Wait a minute; why doesn't it start at this time? Why doesn't it start at that time? Petitions should be moved up earlier."

There's no question that there's an effort to try and fit X number of hours of debate, X number of minutes of petitions, an hour of question period as well as two items of public business—and they are public business—that take place every week when the Legislature is in session. Caucus meetings—it's a gathering of all members of provincial Parliament in their respective caucuses: the government, the official opposition and the third party—in the past, have taken place in the morning. Now it will take place in the time between adjournment after question period and the resumption of debate in the afternoon. So too of cabinet meetings. Obviously, that's going to affect, in a majority situation and I guess under any cir-

cumstances, the government only. However, I think everybody would acknowledge the important business that takes place on behalf of the people, the need to hold these meetings in an appropriate fashion, in a timely fashion and on a regular basis. It's something that all three parties in the past over the years have addressed as particularly important that they take place on a regular basis. I'm sure that the opposition parties would not begrudge the opportunity for cabinet meetings to take place—and I know they would not begrudge the caucus meetings from taking place, because it affects their caucus as well.

So instead it seems as if the focus has been upon—and I'm going to assume without siding—that the official opposition and the third party are not expressing their outrage with regard to these proposals as being focused on the hours. I say that only because I know that the leader of the Conservative Party himself said he thought that that made sense. Those exact words, he used in August of last year, and words arguably to that effect were in their platform: "No, the complaint has not been about the morning to evening; it has been about question period." It has been about the 10:45 a.m. start of question period.

To go back and reiterate: There have been changes in the past to question period. Yes, we are talking about a 48-year-old tradition in this House—oral questions, at one point for 45 minutes; then they became 60 minutes. Yes, they have taken place near the beginning of the opening of each legislative day. That was one of the reasons why the original proposal had question period start at 9:30, which was the original proposal for the Legislature to sit, the idea being, "This is very important business; we want this to be front and centre." It was moved because concerns were expressed that that was just too early; 9:30 was just too early to hold question period, for a variety of reasons, some of which included family and some of which included distance to travel by members in this Legislature. That is why the time was moved from 9:30 to 10:45.

Why not in the afternoon? Why not at 1? Why not at 2? Why not at 3? Again, the goal here is to move it up as close to the commencement of the legislative proceedings as is possible and reasonable. The chief complaint seems to revolve around this idea of preparation. I should tell you that in the discussion that took place, probably in all three caucuses—but I can only say with respect to the government caucus—that there is a distinct opportunity that this may be to the disadvantage of the government of the day. Why? Because the government of the day has got to provide a response. I will say in answer that the opposition will say, "There are no answers coming." I say to you: Within the rules, in responding in question period, the government, far earlier in the day than previously, will have to provide a response.

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Then some concern was expressed by the official opposition and the third party that in fact this was going to be really tough on staff; this was going to be really tough on the people who worked in the ministers' offices, the people who worked in the official opposition and the third party offices, the people who worked in all MPP offices, and the people who worked for the government of Ontario—concern for staff and civil servants.

Mr. Ted Arnott: And accountability.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Okay, we'll get there.

Again, it's going to obviously affect all three parties. It's going to affect the government, official opposition and third party equally, in the sense that we all have the same amount of preparation.

On question period, I think it needs to be said—because I'm sure most members in the Legislature would probably make this characterization of how question period operates. This would be my own personal, general observation of the categories of questions, and we'll see if people listening at home would agree.

There's the question that basically jumps out of the headlines. The opposition parties, whoever they may be, in their morning question period, take a look at what the morning news is, take a look at what seems to be the issue of the day, which is to some extent looking in the rear-view mirror: "This was the issue of the day." In some cases, it is going forward, and the questions are based around that. That's the first category of questions.

The second category of questions is one where the opposition or the third party has engaged in some research, and they've been working on something, not for a morning but for a number of days, and in some cases weeks. It may flow from a freedom-of-information-act request. It may flow out of the gathering of information and statistics. It may involve a particular issue that involves an individual or a family or a group, and that individual, family or group has a point to make, and a concern is raised in question period, and the official opposition or the third party has to arrange it in a way so that the individuals are present in the Legislature. We'll call those the research questions. Those are not questions for which there is an intensive period in the morning requiring some preparation; on the contrary, those are ready to go. In other words, once they have that information, they're going to ask that question. So whether the question period is at 10:45 or at 1:45 makes no difference. Why? Because they've been working on this for a number of days.

The third category of questions is constituent questions: "There's somebody in my riding who has a particular concern, and this is important to my riding, this is important to this constituent and it's important to this member, and I want to raise it in the House, and I need some assistance from the executive council." Again, those questions are there. They're there whether it's 1:45 or 10:45.

So one asks oneself, "What is it about the nature of these headline, already-made, news-gathering questions that requires that extra one, two, three hours of preparation?" It's an interesting question for the official opposition and the third party to answer. What do they need those extra two hours for, when in fact the subject matter is right there in front of them?

The leader of the official opposition asked a question about a poll. I'm presuming it's a poll that was published or broadcast by one of the major media organizations today. Based on that information, the member stood up and, within 60 seconds, offered a question.

Remember, this research that the official opposition and third party are calling for is research to advise a question of 60 seconds, with a 60-second supplementary, and, if it's a leader's question, another 60-second supplementary. Decisions are made, yes, early in the morning by the official opposition and third parties as to exactly what that question is going to be. Is there a need to have an extra two hours of research?

Again, I say it works both ways. If it is that headline-grabbing question, if you like, if it is a question by the opposition that is flowing from the news, if it is a tragedy or if it is a controversy, both the opposition parties and the government are going to have the same amount of time to prepare. If it's a headline or if it's a leading story, if it's within the purview and jurisdiction of a particular minister, that minister is going to be aware of it, aware that a question may come. And members of the official opposition and third party, many of whom have served in governments past, know well that you get prepared for questions that sometimes don't come. You're prepared for that question—and yes, we will have the same amount of time to prepare as others.

But here's one of the problems with the argument. It's that twice a week—two out of the four days that question period takes place—members of provincial Parliament and members of the cabinet, the executive council—ministers—are in fact in a position where they are being questioned in public, scrummed by the media, typically with an opposition member and no doubt a researcher at their side, to answer the questions of the day. Members and cabinet ministers have to be prepared at 9:30 a.m. two out of the four days, so we're talking about the other two days.

One of them is Monday. There was concern expressed by the members that it is very important that MPPs be able to spend Sunday night at home, in their constituency, with their family. I could not agree more; I agree. I don't think, though, that everybody should assume that every member of this House is not able to get to the capital in time for question period at 10:45 a.m. With respect to cabinet ministers, it is part of the responsibility of being a member of the executive council; with respect to those who are asking questions, if you want to ask a question on Monday, it means that the members—not all of whom, obviously, live within a short driving distance of the capital region. I'm very, very aware of that. As the member for St. Paul's, I'm personally very privileged and fortunate that I am in a riding and represent a riding that is a very short distance from Queen's Park. So I, unlike the House leaders of the official opposition and of the third party, do not have the same commute to Queen's Park as they do; I certainly acknowledge that. Nonetheless, I would say with respect that it comes with the territory, in that if you're going to be a member of the executive council or you're going to be asking a question in question period on Monday, you will need to be here in time for 10:45.

These changes are not, obviously, being proposed in a fashion that amounts to constitutional changes that would require a supermajority reversal in order to undo them. The idea here is to change the way this Legislature operates, try out a new system, if it passes, over however many weeks would be left in the spring session, have a committee of this Legislature with representation from all parties review what's happened and come forward with maybe unanticipated consequences, renew major objections—it's an opportunity for the opposition or the third party to say, "See? I told you so." I can certainly commit that the government won't do that. But it will be an opportunity for all three parties, in fact, to look at what happened and see if changes need to be made. Within the standing order changes that are being proposed, the mechanism is in place for it to be returned to the House and potentially undone.

Is this question, concern or expression of outrage with respect to what's happening to our parliamentary democracy through these changes, are these allegations made by these opposition parties really in fact going to unfold over whatever it may be, a four-, five-, six-, eight-week—I don't know—term of implementation in which there is a trial period? I say no; I say that is a hyperbole at its worst.

Traditions are important, and there are some traditions here that we all respect. But those traditions that have abandoned the original principles—that's tradition, as Chesterton said, that "is the democracy of the dead." Tradition for tradition's sake—"Well, we've always done it at 1:45"—is not a good enough reason for us to clutch onto the tradition that the deans of the Legislature, I know, are particularly concerned about because it is a significant change.

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It is my view that this will result in more scrutiny. You're going to have the government's feet held to the fire—people talked about the effect on the media—on the noon broadcast and news. You're going to have an opportunity for opposition members, by which I mean the official opposition and the third party, to continue to move forward on an issue on which the government is under fire throughout the course of the day, whereas now, the way it works—as members of the gallery, I'm sure, would attest and members of the official opposition and third party will confirm—when question period is over, there's a scrum and that's it. C'est tout. It's time to file. That's it. Now there will be an opportunity for all sides to add facts, to be questioned about facts. I say that's more scrutiny. More debate time: That's certainly more scrutiny. More private members' public business: That's certainly more scrutiny and certainly more time for debate.

I am going to again emphasize that one of the pernicious elements of the current legislative situation that came under intense criticism was these evening debates. If we are going to have a sufficient amount of time to de-

bate bills and it's not going to happen in the evenings—and I think we're all in agreement on that—then it has to happen at some point, and that is the mornings. Whether question period happens at 10:45 versus 1:45 and on, whether or not you get more or less scrutiny arguably is in the eye of the beholder. But, more importantly, logic does not bear out that there is a disadvantage to one side or the other side. It does not bear out in that fashion. It may be that the government is able to provide exactly the same answers at 10:45 that would be provided at 1:45. It may be that the same amount of preparation for question period will take place for the opposition as would take place at 1:45.

If this injects an element of spontaneity in the questions and in the answers, I say that would be a good thing. The demise of the script would surely be to the benefit of our democracy if it added an element of balance, as opposed to the question that involves reading and the answer that involves, as the Minister of Transportation said, "Turn to tab sub 4, sub 6." He said, "I don't want to do that." He also had no idea where to find it.

The point is that preparation is important, but sometimes the most dramatic questions or those which have the most impact on public affairs are those that are in fact spontaneous or those that could not be addressed by any research. In fact, if this allows the government to have their feet held to the fire that much earlier, then all the better.

I look forward to this debate. This is an important debate. Nobody should doubt that it's an important debate. I will remind members of this House, and I remind anybody tuning in—by the way, I made reference to the webcast. I was more than happy to confirm that I thought the leader of the official opposition, Mr. Runciman, came forward with a good idea to have these proceedings webcast. They are not currently webcast; they are telecast. He spoke to the level of scrutiny that's taking place. It's an opposition idea, a good idea, something that the Speaker supports and something that the government supports. I want to thank the leader of the official opposition for that important contribution.

So I'm not able to say this to people who are watching live on the Web, but I would just remind everybody that when the official opposition, the Conservative Party, changed the standing order rules and they had the opportunity to engage in discussions with the House leaders, they didn't do that. They didn't do any of it. They didn't meet five times, exchange letters and proposals, and have a discussion about the principles and merits—not for five days or six meetings or four meetings or two meetings. Zero meetings. They didn't forecast that they were going to introduce these changes by way of an open letter to the public. They filed it at 5 p.m. The time allocation of that particular bill took place at midnight.

Of course, time allocation itself is an item that was brought in by the New Democratic Party when they were in government. I know that the House leader for the third party, Mr. Kormos, expressed objections to it. He wasn't able to show up and vote against it, but he did express objections to it when the matter came forward and the New Democrats legislated time allocation.

Is this place working as it should? No, it's not. Is it the culture of the place? Perhaps. Do I have answers as to how to make this place more decorous? It is something that I would hope all members of this House would want and that I should say our Speaker and all our speakers are attempting to contribute to.

This is an effort to address the pernicious evening sittings, to allow for a modernization of legislative hours—something that the leader of the Conservative Party said he supported—and allow for more hours of debate and more question period time. It's for those reasons and more, which will be far more intelligently and articulately made by the member from Huron–Bruce, that the government puts forward these standing orders in good faith, in a desire to improve the way in which public legislative business is done.

We look forward to the debate. If it passes, we look forward to the opportunity to try it out. If that takes place, we look forward to having it reviewed over the summer.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): the member for Huron-Bruce.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It really is my pleasure to rise today to talk about very important changes. I know that change is difficult. One finds that change, whether it be in your home or in your workplace, is always difficult. But one of the things we do know is that change is a constant, and it really must be. Look at how much we have changed over the years when the Legislature was first formed to where we are today. It's incredible when you think about it.

When you have the opportunity to go into our long-term-care homes—and I've heard members from both sides of the House talk about when they have the opportunity to celebrate someone's birthday who's 105. What do they talk about? They talk about how they began their lives in a horse and buggy and how things have advanced so much.

So when we see reforms coming forward, and reforms that are not only important to allow the public the transparency and the accountability that they expect from their government, but also the reform that will allow the members to have a workplace that truly does reflect the people of Ontario—and I think about the first term, when I was elected in 2003. Consistently, the third party voted, every day that there was a vote on evening House duty, No. There was a vote: No. There were about two members from the official opposition: No to House duty. Then that ball increased. There were three from the official opposition; then there were four; then they were split. Then they would sometimes vote one way; then they'd vote somewhere else. But the third party was consistent: "No go. No evening House duty. We aren't interested."

But now, after the election in 2007—and I think it's important that I also add to the record that Mr. Tory is very clear. He was crystal-clear during the last election: "You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock

in the morning. I think, if you had the sittings start in the morning and finish at suppertime, it allows moms and dads and young families to be at home more often with their family and to have the thing be just a bit more family friendly. So I think it means you'd look more often to start in the morning and have your day proceed so that you could use those hours and finish by suppertime."

After the third party voted consistently, "No evening hours," and then there was a ball rolling over on the official opposition, then their leader said, "No House duties in the evening."

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So then we come to today. Today we see that what is before us is accountability, transparency, extension of private members' business, extension of debate time. I know that this House sometimes can be confusing, but you would think that there would be support. But there isn't. So we know that the next vote that comes up on evening House duty, we're going to have the third party and the official opposition vote against it, while they also will probably vote against the reform.

Why is reform important? I've had the opportunity to speak to members who represented Huron–Bruce for a number of years. Let's just talk for a minute about how constituency offices have evolved. When the honourable Murray Gaunt was here, for many years he worked out of his home, and that was what was available for constituency offices. He received all of the calls to his home. His wife was not only his partner but also his receptionist, his secretary, the bookkeeper and everything else. A number of members were experiencing difficulties in their homes.

As time evolved, we came forward with global budgets. We came forward with room within the budgets of the members to have constituency offices. Why did we do that? We did that so that people would have the opportunity to come in and we could work with them, as all members in this House do. That's why, when the first orders came forward, Fridays were included. There were concerns raised, so that was removed. This was done in a manner to be accepted by all members of the House, because there was a recognition of how important for all members the constituency work is, that we represent our constituents in this House.

When we think about how that's changed, how has the role of MPPs changed? To my mind, there have been some very inappropriate comments. I would even equate them to being the bully in the sandbox—when you kick sand and then you call members bad names, and that somehow takes away the focus of the discussion. So I do want to bring it back to a point of discussion when we talk about the role of MPPs.

As you know, I have a very large riding. I don't have the ability to do anything other than drive because I don't have—

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: A chauffeured car.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: That's very true. I can only drive. I cannot get a plane. I cannot get a train without a long drive to get to that, and by then, I'm almost three quarters of the way to Toronto.

Just for anyone who is listening today, I'd like to give them a sense of what it means to be the member from a rural area. It's a three-hour drive one way and so, of course, six hours round trip. You can see that adding that on to a normal workday, which is eight hours—my workdays don't reflect that, but I think it is fair to add the six and the eight; that means 14.

As a result of that, a number of the members from distances—I think that this also needs to be brought forward—have the ability to have accommodations in the city of Toronto to allow those members to come to work on a day-to-day basis without the drive time included, quite obviously because of the hours. When I think about the ability a member has to represent their people—and I can see the members of the opposition; I don't know whether or not they find it amusing that I'm driving, or they find it—

Mr. Ted Arnott: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm just wondering how the comments that the member's putting forward with respect to this debate relate back to the actual text of the motion. I was wondering if—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm listening very carefully, and I'll draw members' attention to that, but all members should keep that in mind. Thank you.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I just want to be very clear so that the official opposition understands what I'm speaking about. What I'm speaking about is reform to the Legislature, and I'm also speaking about the role of the MPP. Just to remind the official opposition, we are the Legislature. The way we conduct ourselves and how we represent our constituents, in my mind, does represent all of the government of Ontario, and they should be mindful of that.

I look at the ability to represent your people and the tools that we are given by this House to make sure that we can do that to the best of our ability. That is a part of it, the accommodation. I know that there has been a lot of discussion about the members having to come in on a Sunday or having to come in on a Monday. I know that a number of the members today come in on a Sunday and a number come in on a Monday. In my mind, it reflects the scheduling that we have today. I'm quite confident that that scheduling will go forward, being respective and reflective of the times that people do come in. It's just different with every member, depending on where they are from.

I think about how, in the past, previous governments have treated the Legislature and how respectful they have been of members. That simply has not happened. I know that often, when one is opposed to change, what one does is then rely on partisan politics in order to prove their point and bring forward a different perspective.

To bring it back to where all this started, this started with a number of members who wanted to see the Legislature adapt to the way society conducts its business today. I believe by bringing forward the modernization, it

in fact does that, while being very respectful of tradition and respectful of the members' time. I look at how we can conduct our business and do it in a manner that we can still allow for the constituent work to be done, because quite clearly, that is the important part of our roles. I believe that by condensing our day and allowing for full debates, the question period and also with respect to private members' time, this really does accommodate that. It lets us have our evenings free to do constituency work or other meetings that we would choose to have, or also to be apart, with our families. I do want to speak about that for just a minute.

When I was elected in 2003, at that time my youngest daughter was 14 years old. What one finds as a mother being elected into the House is that you do a lot of homework over the phone. You do a lot of scheduling over the phone. And I can tell you that juggling evening hours and juggling, "Where's mom? She's not packing my lunch. She's not helping me with my schedule," or "I've had a bad day," or "I've had a great day and I want to talk to my mom about that," is very difficult, as it is for dad as well. So I really do believe that this will give us the opportunity to have what I would call more balance in our lives while still ensuring that we have the time frame to do our jobs in the Legislature.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Everyone here is unbalanced. It's part of the prerequisite.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Well, it's very difficult to juggle. Certainly the member has been quoted a number of times on how difficult it is to juggle.

But if we never begin to bring about the change, then we never get on a different page. Clearly, evening House duty time is the biggest issue because it has been voted on for four years by the third party, and voted on for one year and four years the other. So clearly that is the issue. That is what the reform brings forward.

When I think specifically about the member for Nepean–Carleton, I know that she has been beating her chest and making very inappropriate comments about—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: That's a—

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Well, those are her words; she said those words. I'm only repeating what the member for Nepean–Carleton said, and I do thank you for allowing me to speak to that.

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One of four things that she spoke to on the reforms she would like—I know people want to know—was reducing evening sittings. That, in fact, has been done.

This is Hansard that I'm quoting from. Another point was bringing in a daycare, another point was a prayer room on-site, and another point was creating a spousal association. We can see that the reduction of evening sittings in fact has been achieved by this reform. Some of those others might be something that she would like to work on with her party as well, and some others—you know, the work is never done. There is always much more work to do. But just specifically on the evening sittings: Evening sittings will be limited to the last eight days of the spring and fall session—so quite clearly, much of what she has asked for.

This clearly requires the greatest change within this House. It requires a change in legislation, and that is what we are speaking about today.

I also feel that we need to talk about it so that everyone understands what is before us today. I know that question period is something that people like to turn their TVs on to watch. There have been comments made that if it's at 2, then they wouldn't be able to, but I would argue that if you are available at 2, you're likely available at 10:45, or you can also watch the reruns coming later in the day, as I know many people do, because I certainly receive many comments from my constituents.

At this time I also bring forward, with regard to question period and the ability to watch the Legislature, that it is important that we ensure that our telecommunications keep the Ontario Legislature on their channels. I know that this has been difficult in some areas, so I did want to bring that to the forefront.

I look at the bullet point here, that daily debate time will increase by 25%, making evening debates unnecessary. Mr. Speaker, you know that I come from a municipal background. Quite frankly, I do want to share with the people of Ontario that when I arrived here in 2003 and saw the quality of the evening debate, I did not see how that was moving the province of Ontario forward. The people just felt we could do better, and quite frankly, I believe that we can do better. Around our area, "Early to bed and early to rise" is a saying that is often shared in our communities, so I really do embrace the early morning debates.

I think that having the evenings to not only work on constituency work—I really do believe that it give us time to reflect. We reflect on the discussions that have happened during the day. We have the ability to reflect on novels or books that we would like to read. It also gives us the opportunity to just think about the province and the directions that people want to go. It's just time to reflect. I think that's very important, especially with the busy lifestyles that we lead today.

We think that the 50% increase in private members' business, from two to three items per week—so that is an increase—is very important. I have the opportunity to hear private members' bills from week to week, every week. There is so much work that goes into the private members' bills, and they are such thoughtful, well-researched documents. So often, when we hear about what is happening in other ridings, they are often reflected in the private members' business.

It really is an opportunity for all members to speak to new directions. The opportunity is certainly there for private members' business. I know that I have been moved beyond words at private members' business. As I said to my constituents, "If you want to hear from the members, the best time to come and listen is private members' business." You really do hear, from the members, their viewpoints of what they are interested in and what is of importance to them.

Also, the evening sittings: I just can't speak to that enough. We know; we've seen the votes. But we also understand that the government must go forward and get business done. So the reform that has come forward is a balance of evening sittings, the shift away from the multiple-evening sittings, but it also is very reflective of the work that the government needs to do in a manner that will also allow for our constituency work to go forward as well.

The other thing that is simply not talked about by the opposition is that this is the pilot project proposal. In fact, that is what it is. This will give us the opportunity to try it on, see how it goes, give it a trial run. It will also give us the opportunity to fine-tune it. I know that it's not something that is traditional. But quite frankly, I really do think this will give us the time. Maybe there are some things that we can do that will make it better.

After all, the Legislature is to ensure that the government works for the people of Ontario. It should reflect how the people of Ontario conduct themselves as well. So this is a trial project. That's how, by going to committee, it will give the opportunity for input from both. All the members and the committee members will bring forward the concerns. So it is a spring trial implementation.

I just want to reinforce that Queen's Park sat for 106 days in 2006. That represented more than any other jurisdiction in Canada. So this demonstrates the commitment we have made to the people. Clearly, from each step, accountability, transparency, listening to the people and acting has been the order of business.

I also want to remind people that the standing orders have changed more than 25 times since 1976. The most recent changes—and we certainly have heard a lot about that, and I know we're going to hear more about that. Let's remember: 25 times is how often it has changed. So this is not something that has not been, in the past, the order of business.

There's the member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I was listening to you upstairs.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: That's great.

I did want to reinforce that the modernization legislation, I believe, is an important component of ensuring that the people of Ontario's voices have the ability to be heard and continue to be heard. By moving forward to business hours that are reflected by the people, it will happen.

I do want to share a couple of stories. People have been asking me in my constituency, "Why? Why are you bringing this forward?" We then go through the discussion about why it is important. The next thing that they want to know is, "Why is the opposition opposing it? What is it that they're opposed about when they vote consistently to—which is part of the reform." That's when it gets a bit difficult for the people who are watching this channel. Quite frankly, I find it a bit difficult too.

I really do believe that by coming forward with the modernization to the standing orders, we can conduct the business of the government in a manner that is not only respectful of the traditions of this House but is also respectful of the members' time and the needs from their constituencies, and will give them that opportunity—in fact, will give more opportunities to debate and to bring forward the concerns and also allow for greater debate at private members' time.

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I look forward to the modernization. I am very proud to be part of a government that is bringing change forward, change that the people of Ontario understand is important for the business of government. These changes, I believe, will appeal to all members, as this change has been something that the opposition and the third party have clearly demonstrated that they feel a need for as well. So by moving forward this piece of legislation, we will resolve many of the outstanding issues.

I know that as there will be more private members' time—as a member who will be bringing forward more private members' business—I'm quite anxious to bring forward more legislation and have the opportunities to debate even longer. It's certainly something that I look forward to.

So thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on this very important piece of legislation. I look forward to the official opposition's comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm pleased to join the debate on this motion. I also want to say at the outset that I will be splitting my time with the member for Nepean–Carleton.

It's been most interesting to listen to the House leader and the member from Huron–Bruce. Certainly, their take on what's going on and what's happened is a little bit different when you're sitting in the opposition benches, and I do want to speak to that.

First of all, I want to begin on the manner in which this legislation was introduced. It was done in a very clandestine manner. If you will recall, the information was first leaked to the press on a Sunday afternoon, as opposed to presenting it to the House leaders. This, despite the fact that for almost two months, I had been asking the House leader for a meeting in order that we could begin our consultation and our negotiation and hopefully reach a consensus—because everybody did agree that the standing orders needed to be changed. Obviously, we were hoping that we could have some influence and some impact and have an opportunity to reflect the will of our constituents. That didn't happen. As I say, the press got it first, and we got it after. Of course, that's the way this issue ended as well: The press got the information first and the House leaders got it second.

I would say to you that despite the efforts that we made to initiate this conversation, this dialogue, early in the new year, it didn't begin for almost two months. We did come together on several occasions, as I say, after it was first leaked to the press as to what the government was proposing. But I was shocked. I'm a new House

leader, and I actually thought that we were going to have a meaningful debate, that we were going to have a meaningful discussion. I've certainly participated in many other committees and sat on many boards where people actually do try to reach a consensus. There was never any meaningful discussion on the proposed changes that were presented to us by the government. We had meetings. I would say the discussion was very limited, perhaps five minutes at times. Other times, we presented our proposals to the government and were told that they were going to go back to the powers that be who were going to make these decisions. We asked the House leader why the changes were being made, and could the individual please tell us the principles behind it. Never were we provided with any information as to why these very, very significant, huge changes were being made—not that we objected to the changes. But what was the rationale? What were the principles behind them? In fact, I was surprised today to hear the House leader go on at length, because this is the type of information that he could have presented to us in the House leaders' meeting; I'm surprised there was so much to say. We were always promised a response in those meetings but, unfortunately, we never got it.

The House leader was even quoted as saying—and acknowledging—"I received a counterproposal from both parties, and I provided a counterproposal back." That's it; that was the end of the story. We gave him this; there was no response. He gave us this; there was no opportunity for us to respond. In fact, in the last weeks of the debate, we thought they were going to go to three weeks on and one week off; they held that out to us, and that went nowhere. It's very disappointing that, on very significant changes, there was no opportunity for productive, three-way discussions on these issues.

I want to say that we don't object to change. Change needs to happen. We don't object to the hours—and I am going to speak to what it is we do object to. But we really are very concerned that there is no opportunity for discussion.

I feel that these proposals fail the litmus test of enhancing the accountability of the government to the Legislature and also improving the effective, efficient functioning of the Legislature. I think if you take a look through—and I'm going to refer to that point—they just simply don't measure up, if that's the litmus test we choose to read.

But I want to go back to this whole issue of consultation. If we take a look at what happened in 1999, we have the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North saying—and this was the Conservative government that was in charge—"I'm pleased there has been such co-operation and such understanding." Well, you won't hear that this time. We have Mr. Duncan saying, "Certainly there was give and take. I welcomed the comments of the government House leader today, his willingness to co-operate and to work together to make this place once again the kind of relevant legislative body it was when my colleague from St. Catharines began his career several years ago." He's praising that. Then we have Mr. Bradley saying, "What I think was absent previous to this was any meaningful negotiation between whoever was the government House leader of the day and the opposition House leaders." There was all sorts of positive praise for the Conservative government in 1999 when this was brought forward. In fact, Mr. Bradley concludes by saying, "I want to commend the government House leader and the other two House leaders for making an effort to reach a consensus" and, you know, make things better. That is what was missing from this debate: There wasn't any; there was no discussion. There was simply an exchange of proposals, no more, no less. We were always left with the words, "I'll have to go back to" whoever they report to.

Our leader did want to see discussion; he did want to see further debate take place. John Tory wrote a letter on February 11 to the Premier: "These types of changes deserve far more study and attention than a unilateral, Sunday-afternoon communication by the government," which of course was to the press first, and then to us. Then he goes on to say, "However it appears, though, many of these changes proposed by your government, without any advance consultation, are designed to avoid scrutiny rather than improve accountability." Again, he recommends that the committee that's established to look at how other Legislatures work focus on best practices, ensure that the debate and proposals happen in public view and invite public comment, rather than having the debate behind closed doors. There was never any opportunity thus far for that to happen.

Again, on February 28, our leader, John Tory, acknowledges that the changes are needed, but in light of the dramatic impact the changes are going to have, they should be referred to a committee before they are introduced. We want to make sure that the Ontario Legislature is a more meaningful place for everyone, not just Ontario's governing party.

1700

So we're not averse to the changes. We are averse to the manner in which they were introduced. We are averse to the lack of consultation. Twice, as you can see, we requested in writing that the Liberals refer the matter to committee.

We do know that when the motion passes, it is the plan that the changes will be referred to the Legislative Assembly committee during the summer adjournment, but I guess we all know that by that time, the show really is all over. If the governing party does what they've already done, it's simply a farce to think that there are going to be any changes whatsoever after the fact. If you wanted to make changes, why would you do it after you introduce it, rather than before?

I think it's a feeble attempt by the government to give the impression that they're going to be consulting, when the process should have taken place before the motion was ever debated today. I don't think that the government is fooling anyone. This is a unilateral decision made by them without any input or consultation, and it is a very significant change.

I want to speak a little bit about the committees, because it appears the government lost some steam. They don't seem to have recognized that changes they are making are going to impact the committees of the House, and there's no indication as to what's going to happen.

There are currently nine standing committees. They meet during the day on specific days and at specific times while the House is in session. The addition of the four morning debates now means that in the mornings, there are going to be members in committee and members in the House at the same time.

It's a bit of a disadvantage to the opposition, because you stretch your human resources. We only have 26 members, the NDP have 10, so obviously it's going to place the opposition at a distinct disadvantage if these committees continue to meet in the morning. For example, if you take a look at the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Bill Murdoch, he's not going to be able to sit in the regulations and private bills committee and the House at the same time after these changes are passed. It's going to complicate things for the opposition, but it appears that the government didn't take this into consideration.

It reminds me a little bit of the decision to bring in Family Day. We all know what chaos there was around Family Day. Some people got the day off; some people didn't. Unfortunately, this government sometimes has ideas but they haven't carefully considered a plan of implementation or the consequences of the actions that they're taking. And that's obvious.

What is it that we object to? We don't object to the changes. We don't object to the workload. Folks, when you take on the job of an MPP, you know it's going to be long hours. It's going to be seven days a week, any time of day between 6 o'clock in the morning and 12 at night. We take exception to the change in time of question period. We believe that it is an attempt on the part of the Liberal government to avoid public and media scrutiny.

I guess the reality is, if you are in opposition and you don't have the same resources and the same staff that the Premier has, that the cabinet ministers have, opposition members are going to be at a disadvantage, no matter what anybody tells you.

I was a minister of the crown from 1995 to 2003. It was great. When I got into my office, the ministry staff had reviewed all of the clippings in the whole province. They'd identified the issues. My staff had worked with them. They had the briefing notes and the pages all ready, because you had to be prepared. You had to be prepared first thing in the morning because you never knew when there was going to be press who wanted to speak to you about an issue. But you had great staff and you had great resources.

Unfortunately, when you are in opposition, you maybe have one person who is able to assist you, and they clearly can't do the reading of all the clippings and they obviously can't do all the research or follow-up that might be required. So we are clearly at a disadvantage.

I think somebody talked about the fact that if we have question period and even if you can't prepare—I think the last member who spoke—maybe then there'll be some spontaneity in the questioning. Well, I hope that if she thinks there's going to be spontaneity, the hope on our side would be that maybe this is going to actually lead to the cabinet ministers giving us an answer.

Interjection: Just once.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: As my colleague just said, maybe just once we could get a response.

Anyway, we are concerned about the moving of question period to approximately 10:45. Question period is actually going to be shorter under the new standing orders than it is today. I will be tabling several amendments at the end of my remarks, which, if passed, would move question period to a set time and a certain time of 1 o'clock every single day the House is sitting—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. It would move it up, but there'd be certainty. Because right now, under the proposed changes, question period is not going to start each and every day at 10:45. At 10:45, we're going to have the Speaker introduce visitors and then we're going to start. So we're going to be shortchanged each and every day for question period. I think we all agree that it's great to introduce visitors, but it is going to cut into the question period, and it will mean an unpredictable start. It's rather ironic because the government House leader talks about creating certainty around question period and there's not going to be any real certainty.

We have introduced amendments. Our amendments keep the routine proceedings together, unlike the Liberal proposal. Their proposal splits routine proceedings, potentially creating a little bit of legislative chaos—it's in the morning and it's in the afternoon, question period and routine proceedings. I hope that the ministers are going to be here for question period as well as routine proceedings. I hope that the Premier is also going to be here for both of those times of day. It is important. Routine proceedings are equally important as question period. But really, what the government is proposing here, with a schedule where they split up routine proceedings from question period, somebody—I think my colleague the member from Leeds–Grenville, when he first saw the proposed changes in chart form, noted that it looked a little bit like a dog's breakfast. It's quite chaotic and it will be very confusing to the public because it doesn't provide any certainty about routine proceedings. Again, people do like to come and participate, and routine proceedings now will not be held at the same time as question period; they're going to be split. The debate times are scattered throughout any time of the day, and the overall schedule is quite unpredictable. So we are going to make a motion to move question period to 1 o'clock, a set and certain time every single day the House is sitting.

I want to move now to night sittings. A government that says it wants to get rid of night sittings isn't setting a very good example by sitting two nights this week. It's interesting, because this Legislature only sat about two weeks in a period of nine months. The House was adjourned early last June and we then only sat for two weeks between early June to the end of the year, and we

didn't come back until just recently, as you know. Suddenly, now we're going to have to sit night sittings. If the government wanted to be active and doing things, I don't know why they didn't sit in the fall and I don't know why they didn't sit earlier in the year. You know, folks, after an election, you don't need to take a holiday for two and a half months, almost three months, as this government did. They say that we should be able to get ready for question period at 10:45, but they weren't able to get ready to govern over a period of time.

1710

Let's go back to night sittings. The first proposal that was leaked to the media gave the government the power to sit evenings and midnights, even though they said that they were going to change that. It's very interesting that their original proposal came from a government that was trying to proclaim that the changes were family friendly. I think we were able to help convince the government that we noticed what they were doing and that there needed to be a change to that proposal.

The Liberal's second proposal, the one we're debating today, will now only allow the government to sit evenings and midnights during the last two weeks of the session or during a calendar extension. However, it is during these last two weeks of the session that the most damage can be done to democracy. Under the changes which we have today, under the cover of darkness, the Liberals will now be able to force bills through in record time, because we're changing the calculations in how much time we devote to debate to hours instead of days. Again, it's very worrisome that they are proposing this, and we're going to try to introduce an amendment to provide some certainty and to allow for people to have an opportunity to thoroughly scrutinize legislation.

Right now, it takes a minimum of six days to pass a bill; under the new rules, it will take a minimum of five days to pass a bill. But during the last two weeks of the session with night sittings, it could take as little as four days to pass a bill from introduction to third reading.

This is important: Six to four. That's why I go back to what I say should have been the litmus test. Does this enhance the accountability of the government to the Legislature, to give them the opportunity to pass bills in four days instead of six? No. Does this improve the effective efficient functioning of our province? Again, I would say no. So I think you can see that much of what is here is to avoid public scrutiny and accountability.

Let's go to the issue of work. I've heard the government say that the opposition doesn't want to work. I think that is utter and pure nonsense. I think our leader, John Tory, works as hard as any other person in this province, if not harder than most MPPs. The fact that the government talks about this new schedule resembling the working hours of ordinary Ontarians is rubbish. The reality is, folks, the working day of an MPP is never going to resemble the working day of an ordinary Ontarian by the nature of the work that we do.

By the way, we choose these jobs. We don't have to be here. The reality is, I know for myself, you're up at five o'clock, you're driving into Toronto, you're on your way. The drive now takes you probably two and a half hours, as it did this morning. People work at the end of the day. They have events they go to. In the morning, oftentimes people have events that they go to in their own ridings. You get home on Friday, Saturday or Sunday, and you have constituency appointments. You usually have events all day Saturday and Sunday. In fact, our lives are such that you could avoid eating with your family seven days of the week. But that's the nature of our job. We chose this job. And so for us to think that this revised schedule is going to make it mean that we resemble and have the same working hours as ordinary Ontarians is rubbish. We never will. We didn't sign on to it. We knew it was going to be different, and so be it.

I heard one speaker say that this is going to give her more opportunity to read books. Well, God bless her. I don't know about her, but the only time I read books is when I go on holidays. There's so much signing and so much constituency work to do when you're not here that there's very little time for leisure. You usually have to make a choice: Is it going to be my family instead of my friends? The nature of the job is such that you don't have much free time, but that's okay; we chose it.

Yes, the opposition wants to work. We are prepared to work. We were insulted when the Premier made comments last week about the fact that we didn't want to work. That was why we opposed these changes. That is simply not true. But you have to remember: We have a responsibility not just at Queen's Park but also in our constituency, in our riding. For anybody to say, as the government has said, that "Unless you're at Queen's Park, you're not working," unfortunately promotes that false stereotype that people have about the work we do. It discounts the reality that MPPs work countless hours in their ridings every week, at all hours of the day, including weekends. For the Premier to suggest that if members are not in this House they are not working is absurd.

I hope that we see the cabinet here on a more regular basis all day long. I hope the Premier is going to be here for more than question period. I hope he'll come for routine proceedings in the afternoon, but I guess we'll wait and see.

We have come forward with the counterproposal. Our counterproposal has this Legislature sitting not 27 hours per week, as the government is suggesting; our proposal, based on the amendments that I'm introducing, would have us sitting for 27.5 hours per week.

Let's now take a look at private members' business. Again, this is really quite insulting. What has happened is that the Liberals have moved private members' business from Thursday mornings to Thursday afternoons. I'll tell you, at that time of day on a Thursday afternoon, at the end of the day, during rush hour, there are not going to be people who are able to always come to Queen's Park. In fact, at that time of day on a Thursday, with no government business being debated, you'll be able to roll a ball through this corridor, because this place is going to be virtually deserted. This is going to mean less and less opportunity for private members' bills to get the respect,

the debate and the discussion they deserve. The only people who are going to be here on a Thursday afternoon are going to be the MPPs speaking to the private members' bills and resolutions.

Private members' business, instead of being elevated and given a higher stature, has been relegated to the end of the day, Thursday, when everybody flees this House, to bottom-of-the-barrel status. Are we now going to see cabinet ministers here? Are we going to see the Premier here for private members' business? I don't think so.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: They'll be here for the vote.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Who's going to be here to listen? Who's going to be here to vote? And is it going to make any difference? Few private members' bills today ever see the light of day. We can't even get this government to agree to allow private members' bills that go through committee to be automatically brought back to the House for a vote, so why should we think that this proposal is going to change things for private members' bills? Is it going to ensure that more of them are passed? Is it going to meet the litmus test of accountability and more efficient, effective government? I don't think so. There's no change whatsoever, and that's the type of change the opposition was looking for.

If you take a look at the changes that have been proposed, the manner in which they were introduced, the lack of opportunity to attempt to discuss them, debate them, reach some sort of consensus, you really come to the conclusion that the Liberals had a set agenda. There was a purpose for the timing of all of the events, and it is not to increase government accountability. They are not designed to increase public scrutiny or media scrutiny. The changes, in many respects, are going to weaken the opposition's opportunity for keeping the government in check. This, in turn, is going to undermine parliamentary democracy.

1720

Our caucus and the NDP caucus, obviously, with some of these changes—particularly question period, and the fact that we simply don't have the same human resources as the government does—are going to find it much more difficult to prepare for the 10:45, and that is something that the government isn't prepared to change. So even if they set up a committee, I don't think that we're going to see any changes to that time period.

I want to table a couple of amendments that we think would enhance accountability, and that would make for the more effective, efficient operation of this House. We believe they would achieve two main objectives: (1) They would move question period from the approximate start time of 10:45 to exactly 1 p.m. each day the House is sitting; and (2) the second one would slow down the stealthy, late-night passage of government bills during the last two weeks of the session or extended calendar sitting.

I'm going to now move our amendments.

I move that the proposed new standing order motion be amended as follows:

The proposed new standing order 8(a) is struck out and the following substituted:

"8(a) The weekly schedule for the House when it is in session shall be:

"

Day	Time	Proceeding
Monday	9:30 a.m.	Orders of the day
	12 noon	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Oral questions Members' statements Deferred votes Introduction of bills Reports by committees Statements by the ministry and responses Motions Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

"

Tuesday	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Oral questions Members' statements Deferred votes Introduction of bills Reports by committees Statements by the ministry and responses Motions Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

"

Wednesday	9:30 a.m.	Orders of the day
	12 noon	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Oral questions Members' statements Deferred votes Introduction of bills Reports by committees Statements by the ministry and responses Motions Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

"

Thursday	9:30 a.m.	Private members' public business
	12 p.m.	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Oral questions Members' statements Deferred votes Introduction of bills Reports by committees Statements by the ministry and responses Motions Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

"

The proposed new standing orders 9(a), (b), (c) and (d) are struck out and the following substituted:

"9(a) Except as provided in standing order 6(a.2)(iii) and in standing order 37, at 6 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, the Speaker shall adjourn the House without motion until the next sessional day.

"9(b) At the points each day when the House arrives at a recess or adjournment, as set out in standing order 8(a), such recess or adjournment shall, without motion, be ordered from the chair."

The clause "standing order 11(e) is deleted" is struck out and the following substituted:

"11(e) If on Thursday morning the House is adjourned for lack of quorum during consideration of private members' public business, it shall stand adjourned until 1 p.m. of the same day."

The proposed new standing order 30(a) is struck out and the following substituted:

"(a) At 3:30 p.m. on any day on which the House has not commenced orders of the day, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the routine proceeding currently occupying the House and immediately call orders of the day. However, routine proceedings shall continue past 3:30 p.m. to permit the Speaker to put every question on the deferred votes."

The proposed new standing order 30(a.1) is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 35.1 is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 37(b) is struck out and the following substituted:

"37(b) Where notice has been given and reasons filed, as provided in clause (a), at 6 p.m. on any Tuesday or Thursday, the Speaker may deem that a motion to adjourn the House has been made, whereupon the matter in question may be debated for not more than 10 minutes, 5 minutes to be allotted to the member raising the matter and 5 minutes to the minister or to his or her parliamentary assistant to reply if he or she so wishes. No more than 3 such matters of which notice has been given and reasons filed shall be debated on any single sitting day. At the conclusion of such debate or debates the Speaker shall deem the motion to adjourn to be carried and shall adjourn the House to the next sessional day."

The proposed new standing order 37(e) is struck out and the following substituted:

"(e) When the House continues to meet past 6 p.m. on a government motion as provided in standing order 6(a.2)(iii), the adjournment proceeding under this standing order shall not apply."

The proposed new standing order 38(b) is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 42 is struck out and the following substituted:

"42(a) In each of the 2 periods provided for in standing order 6(a), there shall be 5 sessional days to be known as opposition days.

"Opposition day debates:

"(i) Shall be limited to one per meeting week;

"(ii) Shall be distributed among the recognized opposition parties in proportion to their membership in the House;

"(iii) Shall be taken up upon the commencement of orders of the day following routine proceedings on the designated day, the time available to 5:50 p.m. being apportioned equally among the recognized parties in the House;

"(iv) Shall be prohibited during the last 8 sessional days in each of the 2 periods provided for in standing order 6(a), and during any extension thereof.

"Opposition day motions:

"(i) Shall be filed on a Wednesday, to be printed on the next day's Orders and Notices paper, and setting the day in the following week for its consideration.

"(ii) Shall contain the text of a non-amendable motion to be debated;

"(iii) Shall indicate the minister of the crown to whom it is addressed;

"(iv) Shall not be a motion for second or third reading of a bill;

"(v) Shall not be considered on any day on which the Minister of Finance has given notice of his or her intention to present the budget;

"(vi) Shall not be a motion of want of confidence in the government.

"(b) If more than one notice of an opposition day is filed on the same Wednesday, the Speaker shall select which one will be considered.

"(c) If a recorded vote is requested on an opposition day motion, the division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes."

The clause "Standing order 43(b) is amended by deleting '5:50 p.m.' and substituting '5:35 p.m.'" is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 57(a.1) is struck out and the following substituted:

"(a.1) On the day designated for the presentation of the budget, the House shall recess immediately following routine proceedings and shall not meet again until 4 p.m., when the order of the day shall be for presentation of the budget."

The proposed new standing order 57(a.2) is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 79(b.1) is amended by adding the following thereto:

"If the House is meeting pursuant to standing order 6(a)(i) or (ii), a government bill shall not be called if it has previously been called during orders of the day on that same sessional day."

The proposed new standing orders 96(e) and (e.1) are struck out and the following substituted:

"(e) When the time allotted for the consideration of private members' public business has expired or at 12 noon, whichever is later, the Speaker shall put all questions to the House. Divisions under this standing order shall be deferred and taken in succession. In such cases, the division bells shall be limited to 5 minutes. The House will continue to meet until the necessary votes have been completed, at which time the Speaker shall leave the chair until 1 p.m."

Those are the motions that we are suggesting.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Witmer has moved an amendment to government notice of motion number 59.

1730

Interjection: Dispense.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I have it in my hands, and I've heard "Dispense."

Now the member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to thank the official opposition House leader for her comments. I appreciate her total frustration with the government House leader and I support all of her amendments.

This substantive government motion requires serious thought among my colleagues on all sides of the chamber, and my comments today are designed to provoke that kind of thought. I also have some suggestions for the government which I hope they will consider so we can truly call these standing order changes family friendly in the context of real parliamentary reform. I say this because what is decided on when we vote on this substantive government motion will not only govern our work life here in the assembly, but will also impact what we do in our constituencies, as well as our family life.

Each member here is a steward of this Legislature. We are the conscience of this place, and we are expected to modernize Queen's Park to help it adapt to the changing times so we can best represent the people who sent us here. We must do this together. One member or one party deciding how we proceed is not enough. Our collective ideas will be what makes Queen's Park more representative, more functional and more democratic.

Pardon my idealism, but that is where my disappointment comes in with the rule changes that are being thrust upon us. The government's rule changes are an insult to those of us who have been working on a non-partisan basis to make Queen's Park more family friendly. In this era of democratic reform or democratic renewal, we have an opportunity as legislators, not just as Conservatives, Liberals or New Democrats, to work together to make changes that will reflect the generational, gender and ethnic diversity that we now celebrate in this chamber. But what that means is that we need to work together—not alone, as the government has done in this case.

Queen's Park was created over 200 years ago, long before women had the right to vote, long before men took on greater parenting roles at home, and long before the diversity we now celebrate in this chamber was represented in the seats that were created to represent Ontarians. We now have 107 members representing regions that are each as different as us. That is why these major rule changes should have included all of us.

It is very well known that I have long advocated for making Queen's Park more family friendly; indeed, all of politics. Some believe in this quest and others balk at it. But just as I decided long ago that I was elected to become a fighter for the residents of Nepean–Carleton, at the same time I became what I think is an unlikely fighter for parliamentary reform. I realized shortly after I was elected that the voters in Nepean–Carleton gave me a

very unique opportunity in this chamber. I am the youngest, I am a woman and I am a mother. This combination in politics is very rare. It is made even more rare when you consider that I am the youngest woman to ever represent my party, either federally or provincially.

When I came to this place over two years ago, I thought I could either shut up or put up with the obstacles that I felt were placed in my way. But I decided differently. I decided that I could either complain about something or I could do something about it. So, true to my nature, I did something about it with my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Over a year ago, I made my first recommendations to achieve a better standard at Queen's Park, such as eliminating evening sittings, refining standing orders and considering an on-site daycare so parents like me wouldn't be forced to choose between being a good parent and being a good MPP. I was persistent in raising this issue in the chamber, and my first resolution as a re-elected MPP was calling on the assembly to create an all-party committee of past and current members to make Queen's Park more family-friendly. I believed then, as I still do, that we have an opportunity to really reform Parliament, but we can only do it right if we learn from each other's mistakes and from past mistakes and we engage one another. Even the slightest change here could potentially help us represent our constituents that much better.

I admit to being humbled on December 11, 2007, when the government decided to adopt my resolution and sought, then received, unanimous consent to create an all-party panel to look at ways to make Queen's Park more family friendly. I remember that day well; I thought I had set the stage for real change, real reform in this Legislature. But I was wrong. After months of writing unanswered letters to the government House leader and raising the need for the family-friendly panel to meet, I was surprised and taken aback to learn he was tabling substantive changes to the rules here under the guise of family friendly, after he outright ignored my requests for meetings. Of course, I learned this from the media and not from him, which made these changes even more insulting.

There is nothing family friendly or democratic about the way these rules were devised. For him and the Premier now to suggest that these rule changes are in the interest of making Queen's Park more family friendly is, at best, disingenuous. It is troubling that the government chose to undermine the very democratic institution which it is supposedly trying to reform. That's the real irony here. In order for the Liberals to achieve democratic reform, they stomped on democracy. The Liberals refused to put to work the very committee it helped to create in making this institution a more democratic, representative and family-friendly institution.

The biggest problem with these rule changes is that they were decided on unilaterally. The Liberals think they can dictate to us. They think that they know best. That is why these rule changes should not be taken lightly by any member of this chamber, because they don't know best; we all, together, do. This is particularly important for members of the opposition, as I will remind the members of today's government, who could be tomorrow's opposition. It is the rules in this place which protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority. That's why I want to outline to you some of my concerns and suggestions.

I must say at the outset that I do support the new hours that are recommended, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., but there are far more flaws in these changes than there are strengths. I think our House leader, the honourable member from Kitchener–Waterloo, aptly outlined the deficiencies in this substantive government motion, and I fully support the resolution that she put forward in order to improve this.

But with respect to Mondays, while 9 a.m. is a perfect start time for every other day of the week, it must be noted that if you live in eastern Ontario, like I do, from time to time you may need to take the train to Queen's Park, in which case you will not arrive in Toronto until after 10 a.m., or you will have to arrive the night before, which will cut into constituency and family time. You should note that those of us representing rural ridings cherish Sunday afternoons for their church suppers, golden wedding anniversaries and major sporting events. The rule changes before us are Toronto-centric and play into the hands of the governing party, who, by their numbers, can easily get the majority of their members to the provincial capital, compared to Her Majesty's loyal opposition. But I digress. The reality is that a 9 a.m. start time on Monday potentially limits commute options for all members outside the GTA. That's regardless of political party, whether that's Liberal, Conservative or NDP, and regardless of region. Therefore, I recommend that the House begin its proceedings slightly—but not much—later on Mondays, and continue with the 9 a.m. start on each subsequent day of the week.

I've also called these reforms cabinet friendly as opposed to family friendly. I've done so because of two major issues and concerns that I have.

The first is question period. I'm disappointed that we will once again be placed in the same situation we are now in, which is inconsistency, without a permanent start and stop time for question period. In fact, the entire day, as outlined by the government House leader, is a crapshoot, with more moving targets than you would find in a video game. The daily timetable is so uncertain that it lends itself to being manipulated by its own rules.

I, then, reiterate my public call for question period to begin each day at 1 p.m. for one hour, with no possible interruptions. Everyone knows that question period is the opposition's greatest tool. It should be consistent every day with respect to length and certainty.

The introduction of guests and the possibilities of ringing bells and debates can only lead to interruptions of what is the so-called main event of provincial politics, and that's our question period. I urge the government to consider changing question period to a stand-alone hour, with members' statements, at 1 p.m. This should be a firm commitment so that all members can properly plan their legislative day.

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I might also point out that, as a mother of a small child, the way that the rules have been explained to me from the experts at the table suggests that there is no strict timetable that we will be adhering to. That is the biggest problem for any of us who are trying to take a child to a dentist or doctor's appointment. It is very unfriendly. I would suggest that they reconsider how they've laid out the day—to make the stop and start times very, very firm, because as my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo mentioned, it is a dog's breakfast at this point in time and there is a lot of uncertainty in the day. We need to grab hold of that so that we can actually firm up the time.

My second cabinet-friendly concern is private members' business. I urge the government to reconsider relegating private members' business to Thursday afternoons, because if Mondays limit the commute options for out-of-town MPPs, then Thursdays will highlight the free ride of the cabinet.

With private members' business taking place on Thursday afternoons, the cabinet, under the current rules, with an early morning question period, can spend afternoons throughout Ontario travelling around cutting ribbons and handing out novelty cheques, as the rest of us debate bills and resolutions that will have no cabinet audience and no chance of succeeding. My colleague suggested that they go into the legislative black hole. That's indeed where they go, and we've seen the signs of that so far, early on. My own experience last Thursday suggested the same.

With private members' business taking place, it's not fair, in the interest of democracy and in the interest of parliamentary reform and renewal, that we relegate the one opportunity each of us has here to represent our constituents without having a partisan label attached to us to the very end of the day.

But my overarching concern is that these unilateral rule changes do not take into consideration the larger issues of making Queen's Park a more modern institution. It will take more than simple rule changes on how we govern our day. I still believe we need to consider some form of child care, a centre or a family room for members with small children; some form of spousal association; and some form of prayer room, as my colleague from Huron–Bruce so aptly highlighted earlier when she was talking about my efforts to make Queen's Park more family friendly.

I also believe we need to make Queen's Park more accessible to our constituents. Last week, I tabled a resolution calling on the Legislature to broadcast Queen's Park on TVO and TFO, place our proceedings live online, and to negotiate with Bell ExpressVu. That call was followed up today by the leader of the official opposition, the member for Leeds–Grenville, and was supported to some extent. What that means or not, by the government House leader, I'm not sure, so we'll wait and see. But if the experience of trying to get these proceedings placed online through webcasts or on TVO and TFO were up to the government House leader—well, through this experience, I won't hold my breath. Our constituents have a right to know what we are doing here. They have a right to know and they have a right to access our debates.

The government has a golden opportunity to make real, positive change, and I mean change: change that is good for our Parliament, change that is good for our democracy and change that will lead the way in our country. We can really become family friendly here, and we can lead by example for the rest of the country. Or we can play politics as usual, which is what I saw earlier when the government members spoke.

We have an opportunity. In this very important age and era of democratic reform and democratic renewal, which I think every member in this House will agree has taken on a new importance in Legislatures and in the House of Commons—right across this land—it's up to us to get it right.

As I conclude, I want to remind members that this is not the government's choice. What we do on these resolutions—and this is a substantive government resolution—and how we debate the amendments put forward by my colleague: I remind everyone that it's our choice. I speak to government backbenchers, as I look at them right now: It's also your choice.

As I conclude with a little bit of time on the clock, I'd like to reiterate the fact that I do appreciate, as a mother, that we'll have an opportunity to work in this chamber from 9 until 6. Having said that, I have a few concerns, based on geography and based on the travel times on our Monday morning commute. We should consider what they're doing in the federal House, which is starting a little bit later on a Monday morning.

I also want to reiterate my call and the call of many others here in this chamber, particularly those of us in the opposition, for a consistent question period in the afternoon. It's not much to ask for. If they truly want to be here, extending an olive branch and working with the members of the opposition, there are a few easy ways to go about that, and I encourage that.

Finally, I just want to say that, in terms of private members' business, if we really want to enhance the role of private members in this chamber, then the time for debate on private members' business should not be relegated to Thursday afternoons. I know the member from Huron–Bruce. I know she cares so much about her constituency. She often has private members' business and I know, like me, that she enjoys being in this chamber to speak to legislation, but I respectfully disagree that Thursday afternoon is the best place for that debate. I think we really must consider what we are voting on in terms of what is happening between 9 and 6. It's not so much a "why" as it is a "when": When are we debating things? I know that with respect to routine proceedings, they should be kept together. I think that is important.

This is not new. Debating parliamentary reform has gone on for years. In fact, it was the former Liberals federally, under Paul Martin, who coined the phrase "democratic deficit." They also coined the phrase "democratic renewal." You'll remember at the time that they actually

had two ministers responsible for changing Parliament. They had Belinda Stronach responsible for democratic renewal, and Mauril Bélanger, who's a very good friend of mine from the city of Ottawa, was the Minister for Democratic Reform—democratic reform and democratic renewal. I'll tell you: Only Liberals could figure out how to put more bureaucracy on reforming government.

In any event, it's very important that we get this right because we can be a leader in this nation by actually taking seriously the task before us, which is renewing Parliament and making it more family friendly through modernizing what we do here and how we debate. I take that role very seriously because, as I indicated, when you're elected at a young age from very far away, there are a few obstacles in your way. I happen to be a woman on top of that. It's in no way to make this a gender debate, but I can tell you, I would never have fathomed in a million years what my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo went through between the time she was first elected and now until I actually walked a mile in her shoes for two years.

As I close, I just think that we may not want to rush this. We may want to do it right. We may want to consult our colleagues at the table, who can give us the best expert advice in this country. We may want to consider the impact and the ramifications not just on party politics but on how we represent the people who sent us to this place to have meaningful debate.

On that note, I respectfully conclude my time here to speak to this substantive government motion. Again, I urge all members of this place to do the right thing, not the easy thing. Don't be whipped into changing these resolutions or the way we conduct our business without seriously considering what these changes will mean.

I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I believe we have consent to stand down the lead of our House leader.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is there consent to stand down the lead speech? Agreed? Agreed.

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Ms. Andrea Horwath: It gives me great pleasure to have an opportunity to talk a little bit tonight—unfortunately, not for very long; there are about 10 minutes left in tonight's debate. I certainly do have some remarks that I'm going to put on the record.

I have to tell you that when I was listening to the government House leader in his leadoff debate tonight, I was sitting here, my lonely self, and I started to imagine that I was listening to one of the fish tales of my very good friend who sits beside me from the riding of Timmins–James Bay. Of course, everyone knows that there's no fishing like the fishing in his riding. But some of the stories that he comes back with are pretty—well, some of them are kind of unbelievable. I was starting to get this sense of déjà vu, that I was listening to the member from Timmins–James Bay on a fish tale when in fact I was listening to the government House leader describe not only the intent but the content of the rule changes that the government motion this afternoon describes.

I say that in all seriousness because really, the House leader set out this premise that from day one, the family-friendly committee was not going to deal with standing order changes and that standing order changes were going to be shunted off to the House leaders to decide or to some other process.

First of all, anybody who is serious about the issue of family friendly is going to be informed by discussions that would happen by said committee. It only makes sense. Why set up a committee to have a broad look at the issues of making this place more family friendly, and then turn around and not even discount what they say but not even put the committee together; don't even have the pretense of putting the committee together and giving them the opportunity to have that discussion?

Who knows? It could be that the family-friendly committee, had they ever had a chance to meet—which they have not, because the government refused to bring a person forward to put on that committee. The member for Nepean–Carleton and I had a couple of conversations, eagerly awaiting when it would be that we would have that committee meeting. If the government was serious about family-friendly changes to the standing orders, then they would have given that committee not the opportunity to make recommendations on the changes per se, but given that committee an opportunity to talk about what things were barriers to good family life and participation, what things were perhaps positive around here in regard to the opportunity to keep your family connections alive and well, and other kinds of issues. But no; that general conversation wasn't even facilitated by the government. The family-friendly committee—I guess you can call it that, even though it really doesn't exist and never has—could have been a good opportunity to raise some issues that might have informed the government. It's the height of arrogance and really it speaks to whether or not this is all about what the government pretends it's about, which is family friendly, when, in fact, we know that it's not. It's really obvious that this committee was not given any opportunity whatsoever to do its work.

Anybody who would imagine that the moving of question period to the morning, but more importantly, the moving of the debate period to 9 o'clock in the morning, particularly for me—I come in on a Sunday night and I end up spending much of the week here. And I live close by; it's just that during rush hour it takes two and a half hours to get here, and the train service to Hamilton is still not such that it's easy to get back and forth with so few trains running. It's different for me than for other members, even members who are in the GTA. I know that for my own staff, it often takes a significant amount of time to get here. And God forbid there's a problem with the TTC or anything else. I'm not talking strike; I'm just talking breakdowns, because we know those things are happening as well. So that's an issue that I don't think the government has taken into consideration. It's not just about the question period; it's about the 9 o'clock start for debate time.

Take that back even another layer, and there's a whole infrastructure of people who make this place operate. I'm not just talking about the staff of political parties. I'm not just talking about our staff or ministerial staff or anything like that. I'm talking about the framework, the structure that makes this place operate. I'm talking about, for example, the Hansard people, the people who do the Hansard for us, who do research, and the people who are part of the Legislative Assembly staff. Those people are going to have to adjust completely. Some of them might be single parents. How do we know? They're going to have to be getting here a lot earlier than they were before. Maybe they're accustomed to taking their kids to child care or taking their kids to school before arriving here because they don't have to be producing Hansard until later in the afternoon.

But back to the beginning of my remarks, when I was thinking that I was hearing a fish tale by the government House leader, one of the other things that he raised—I was shocked; really, I was shocked. For him to pretend, for there to be any pretence at all, that the members in this place are not working all hours of the day and night is, I think, bizarre. Pretty much every morning of the week, there's a committee meeting. Every afternoon of the week, there are often committee meetings. I know today I had a committee meeting and I'm looking forward to the next couple of Mondays to continue to have committee meetings, because guess what we're doing? We're trying to hire an independent child advocate, and that doesn't get done willy-nilly; that takes a lot of hard work, and that's one of the obligations of the people in this House.

I think the government House leader used language like—something about undertaking public business or business that was in the public interest or serving the public interest. I would say that not only do question period and debate time serve the public interest, but certainly the hiring of an independent child advocate or the meeting of the justice policy committee or the meeting of the regulations and private bills committee or the meeting of the finance committee—I mean, give me a break. All of these pieces of work that we do in here are taking place between 9 o'clock—in some cases, 8 o'clock or 8:15—right through until about 6 o'clock at night. So I think it's a little bit disingenuous, at best, to suggest that, first of all, members aren't here very early—often well before 8:30; sometimes well before 8 o'clock—and also that the work that we are doing during that time is anything but serving the public business or doing public business.

I don't have very much time left at all, but I do think it's important to indicate that we're not the only ones who are concerned about the anti-democratic nature of this proposed rule change, this standing order change. There's a landmark study of the Ontario Legislature that was done by a pre-eminent expert on the Ontario Legislature, a professor named Graham White. He has written, "Question period is arguably the most significant proceeding in the Ontario Legislature." I certainly hope that we'll be hearing from him in a more fulsome way around this debate, but it makes me think of an article that I read in the weekend clippings from Christina Blizzard. One of the things that she said in the Toronto Sun, in describing the actual process that was being undertaken here, is that "what is happening here is a manipulation of the House rules in a most despicable fashion." She goes on to say, "Having it early in the morning,"—meaning question period—"before the news of the day has even circulated, is simply a way of hiding cabinet behind parliamentary procedure."

She goes on to talk about how that will affect the ability of the reporters—not only the opposition, and we've had some debate about that already—to be able to have access to cabinet ministers in order to ask them questions during scrums. She indicates quite clearly in her remarks, and I would agree with her, that the opportunity to have those discussions is truncated significantly by the standing order changes that the government is putting forward. She goes on to say, "This is arrogant and manipulative and it is not in the best interests of democracy and open government." And that's certainly something that New Democrats are saying about this change.

The sad thing is that we all know, or at least—I don't know if the government members know; I don't know what they're privy to in terms of the process here. But certainly our caucus is aware, and I'm sure that the PC caucus is aware, that there have been other suggestions and other models that have been brought forward, models that do change the time of question period, but they also provide enough flexibility in the day that we actually have time for committee meetings and that we're able to actually function appropriately, and that don't turn the whole backbone of this place into complete disarray.

I have to tell you that all four of those proposals that were brought forward—and the government House leader and opposition House leaders were all made aware of these proposals—were summarily dismissed. Instead, we have this proposal that has so many holes in it, it's like Swiss cheese. How do you like that? That's what my dad used to say about my brother. My brother was a goaltender all his life, and still is, and when he had a bad game, my dad used to say, "Jeez, you were Swiss cheese out there." Well, this is Swiss cheese too, I think, when it comes to whether or not these standing order changes, first of all, will function in a way that brings greater scrutiny and greater democracy to this place and, in fact, whether these standing orders have anything at all to do with being family friendly. I think if the government actually stuck to our calendar, for example—that's another thing they could do to make it more family-friendly, because it's predictable and members can plan around it.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Tuesday, April 22.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
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Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
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Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
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Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	

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First Session, 39th Parliament

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Tuesday 22 April 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature

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Mardi 22 avril 2008

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 22 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 22 avril 2008

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NIAGARA WEEK

Mr. Tim Hudak: I am pleased to rise in the House to call the members' attention to the fact that this week is the fourth annual Niagara Week at Queen's Park.

I want to recognize the hard work of Niagara regional chair Peter Partington and the many mayors, councillors and Niagara business and academic leaders who are joining us here today.

They're meeting with MPPs of all parties as well as various ministers to draw attention to some very important priorities they have identified in the Niagara region, including the expansion of GO Transit service to Niagara, the completion of the Highway 406 extension to East Main Street in Welland, and the needed acceleration of the mid-peninsula corridor project. Speaking on behalf of west Niagara, investment is much needed for tender fruit farmers and greenbelt communities, where more than 3,700 acres have been affected by recent plant closures, like CanGro and Cadbury Schweppes.

Furthermore, the mayors and councillors will press for investments to improve ambulance response times, which, because of off-loading delays, unfortunately have increased in Niagara by 40%—and the impact of newly designated, provincially significant wetlands on investment and growth, particularly the Niagara Falls to Fort Erie corridor. Obviously, tourism is always important and there is great opportunity presented by the War of 1812 bicentennial.

I invite members to make sure they stop by the Niagara reception in rooms 228 to 230 between 4:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. this evening.

MARY ELLEN PAULI

Mr. David Orazietti: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to honour an outstanding act of courage and citizenship by a brave Ontario woman. Mary Ellen Pauli, a helicopter pilot with the Ministry of Natural Resources, received the Governor General of Canada's certificate of commendation at a ceremony in Timmins earlier this week. The certificate of commendation honours Canadians who have made a significant contribution to our country by providing assistance to another person in a selfless manner.

On August 19, 2004, Ms. Pauli took an emergency call from the Ontario Provincial Police. A father, grandfather and three children were stranded on an island at the mouth of the Sutton River in Hudson Bay. The family had sent out a distress call before losing their satellite telephone connection, knowing that the rising tide would eventually cover the low-lying island in more than a metre of water. The five stranded were in great peril.

Ms. Pauli was flying a survey crew in the Moosonee area when she heard the emergency call, and she immediately volunteered to attempt a rescue. Flying into heavy winds, rain and sleet, she arrived at the island and was able to safely evacuate the family. As a result, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' aviation and forest fire management branch nominated Ms. Pauli for this well-deserved commendation.

Mary Ellen Pauli's selfless act of bravery in helping a family in need, despite the significant risks she faced, is admirable and an inspiration to all Canadians. I am proud to honour her in the House today.

BEEF PRODUCERS

Mr. Bill Murdoch: A typical beef product exchanges about 30 hands and travels hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres from the time it's weaned until the time it ends up on our plate. All County Feed and Grain is changing that trend in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound by introducing a new marketing tool for beef products. Much like the 100-mile diet concept, this Markdale feed company's values are based on supporting local food production.

All County Feed and Grain is helping local farmers increase their profits by eliminating the middleman and buying and selling only locally grown beef to local customers. They buy the animals locally, they feed the animals locally, they truck them to a local slaughterhouse, and they store them locally before selling the final product through local butcher shops, retailers, restaurants and institutions.

I support this integrated process because I believe it's a more sensible way than that of the big conglomerates. At a time when beef producers are losing between $200 and $400 per animal, the more people we can get behind our local farmers the better. Let's face it: If we were to lose these cow-calf operations in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, we would be in trouble.

This local beef is raised without hormones and antibiotics. It's also fresher, and that means tastier and more nutritious.

All County Feed and Grain owners Darryl Williams and Mark Kuglin started their business only two years ago, first selling feed for horses from a mill between Markdale and Meaford, and eventually expanding into buying and selling beef products. Last week, they processed about 100 animals. Again, at a time when farmers are struggling financially in the face of crippling cattle markets, this is a good-news story that offers all of us a new glimmer of hope.

CITIZENS FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Michael Prue: On Earth Day, it seems appropriate that I stand in this place to talk about a local group, Citizens for a Safe Environment. It was founded 25 years ago this month, and 25 years ago, when it was founded, one of the founding members was our own Marilyn Churley, who has gone on to great and wonderful things. That group has targeted polluters in Toronto's east end. It has been instrumental in stopping garbage incineration as far back as 1989. It stopped the sewage sludge being burnt in the Portlands area and did the first Toronto recycling feasibility study in 1988. Later on, of course, they were instrumental in our communities' actions around the Portlands Energy Centre, unfortunately not with the same success.

Tonight marks their 25th anniversary. They are having their 25th annual general meeting. It is being held at the Ralph Thornton Centre at 765 Queen Street East.

I rise to give kudos to all of the people over those 25 years, the people who have fought for a safe environment, who have got the lead out of the soil, who have stopped the incineration. My kudos to the president, Karen Buck, and to her band of environmental warriors who continue the fight that was begun all that time ago and who continue to do really great things for our city and for our world.

1340

FISH FRIDAY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Last Friday, I had the pleasure of attending an event that is becoming a tradition in the riding of York South–Weston. It is known as Fish Friday and is a great example of what can be achieved when communities work together towards mutual understanding and co-operation.

The event is organized by the Grenadian-Canadian community through the Spice Isle Association. As you may know, Grenada is also known as the Isle of Spice. There are more spices on this Caribbean island per square mile than anywhere else in the world. In Grenada, Fish Friday is a cultural event that happens every week. Here in Canada, for practical reasons, it's held once a month and is well attended by residents of all ages. It really captures the essence of the island's culinary traditions and fosters an ambiance of goodwill.

This local tradition is the result of hard work. The Spice Isle Association's main goal is to bridge the gap between the Toronto police force and youth within the Caribbean community by fostering positive relations between them. Maria Meyers, the organizer of the event, works with the community police liaison committee of 12 Division in the riding of York South–Weston to encourage positive participation from local police officers, who during these evenings enjoy Grenadian music and food with the community in a relaxed setting.

I commend the people involved. I must say that this serves as a great example of how we can promote dialogue and learn about each other through informal cultural gatherings. In our multicultural society, we would go a long way by following this laudable initiative.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: I first rise to extend and express my support for Earth Day.

However, Mr. Speaker, I rise to inform the House of teacher layoffs in my riding of Durham. The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board says that nearly 100 teachers could be facing layoffs this school year. The chair of the school board, Diane Lloyd, was quoted in our local media saying that many other school boards across Ontario are facing similar challenges. In the Durham Catholic board, notices of redundancy were sent to 88 teachers. We have all read the media articles today about the challenges facing the Toronto District School Board. In the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board, 27 elementary schools are facing the possibility of being closed.

School closures, layoffs and deficits are in the future for many Ontario schools. This government could start to show some leadership with the delivery of the $550 million promised to rural schools that are closing in Ontario. Unfortunately, Ontario lacks any plan or direction from this government and its policies that will protect communities and retain front-line staff in schools.

Mr. Speaker, you know that you in your riding and those in every riding in this House should be concerned and expressing our sincere concerns for the quality of education for our young people. It's not just about rejigging the governance model for the Toronto District School Board. The closing of swimming pools, the closing of community schools—there simply is no plan for education, and our young people are at risk in the province of Ontario.

19 ON THE PARK

Ms. Helena Jaczek: On Friday, April 11, I had the pleasure of attending the groundbreaking ceremony for the future 19 on the Park, an initiative in the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville within my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham.

Mr. Speaker, 19 on the Park is the concept name for the restoration and development of the historic former town hall at 19 Civic Avenue in the downtown core of Stouffville. I wish to applaud my community, which has independently raised $300,000 to support this splendid project. I'm also proud to announce that this project's completion has now been assured because of provincial funding under the municipal infrastructure investment initiative. Our Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal has provided a grant of $930,000 to assist the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville in realizing its vision of having its own vibrant and growing multipurpose community arts and cultural centre.

Nineteen on the Park will feature a variety of activities, including exhibitions, films, live dance and musical performances, corporate and social receptions, meetings and workshops, and many other community events. The centre's flexible space will complement the meeting place role of Civic Square and Memorial Park and will promote increased pedestrian traffic along Main Street in downtown Stouffville.

Thank you to the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the government of Ontario for providing the means to permit this cultural hub to become a reality.

HORNEPAYNE SAWMILL

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I want to spend but a few moments reflecting on a family and a community. Almost two years ago, a fire devastated the local sawmill in Hornepayne, a community of about 1,200 people which is 100 kilometres north of Highway 17, north of Lake Superior. It is a railroad town. Canadian National is still the largest employer, but it is only a shadow of what it once was and what it was expected to be.

The sawmill is the second-largest employer in town. It was founded by Olav Haavaldsrud, and continues to be operated by the family. The Haavaldsrud family and their employees decided to rebuild the mill, a decision the family freely admits was about the community, the workers and, yes, their own family. They do not claim it to be solely a business decision.

With the assistance of the forest prosperity fund, the northern Ontario heritage fund, northern Ontario grow bonds, a new banker and, most of all, sheer determination, the mill is now reopened with a state-of-the-art sawmill line. The company now produces top-quality lumber at competitive prices.

This family, with their employees and with the support of the province of Ontario, has produced good, sustainable jobs in the forest industry in very challenging times. I want to congratulate the Haavaldsrud family, their employees and, most of all, the community of Hornepayne.

NIAGARA WEEK

Mr. Kim Craitor: This week is Niagara Week at Queen's Park. This week has become a great tradition here in Toronto. I want to welcome back to this assembly the chairman of the region, and in fact a former member of this House, Peter Partington. Welcome. Joining him today are many mayors, councillors, economic development officers and business leaders, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention my mayor from Niagara Falls, Ted Salci. Welcome, Ted. As the regional chairman has said to many of us, this is the week that he wants to thank our government for the investments we have made in the Niagara region.

As well, this week is about showcasing the new Niagara: bigger, bolder and better than ever. We have a great park system, a growing agricultural community, many superb attractions, including two casinos, four- and five-star hotel accommodations, several championship-rated golf courses, a world-class professional theatre, a new convention centre in the works, and one of the nicest places to visit and in which to live in Ontario.

I need not remind the members that Niagara has extremely fine VQA wines and great restaurants that feature Ontario-grown produce. But I do want to remind you that we will have a chance to sample some of the great Niagara regional wines and foods at a reception later this evening. I'm hoping that all the members will be there. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone, including you, Mr. Speaker.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm seeking unanimous consent. It's National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week, and the Ontario Trillium Gift of Life Network has asked that we wear these green ribbons and that they be made available in both lobbies.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COSMETIC PESTICIDES BAN ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 SUR L'INTERDICTION DES PESTICIDES UTILISÉS À DES FINS ESTHÉTIQUES

Mr. Gerretsen moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 64, An Act to amend the Pesticides Act to prohibit the use and sale of pesticides that may be used for cosmetic purposes / Projet de loi 64, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les pesticides en vue d'interdire l'usage et la vente de pesticides pouvant être utilisés à des fins esthétiques.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I will make a statement during ministerial statements.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Michael Bryant: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business:

Mrs. Jeffrey and Mr. Qaadri exchange places in order of precedence, such that Mrs. Jeffrey assumes ballot item 25 and Mr. Qaadri assumes ballot item 22; Ms. Pendergast and Mr. Levac exchange places in order of precedence, such that Ms. Pendergast assumes ballot item 30 and Mr. Levac assumes ballot item 20.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Agreed to.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 22, 2008, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margarett
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Caplan, David
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Mauro, Bill
McNeely, Phil
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Orazietti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Smith, Monique
Sorbara, Greg
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
Chudleigh, Ted
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kormos, Peter
MacLeod, Lisa
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Savoline, Joyce
Sterling, Norman W.
DiNovo, Cheri
Elliott, Christine
Gélinas, France
Hardeman, Ernie
Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Marchese, Rosario
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John
Tabuns, Peter
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 48; the nays are 31.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PESTICIDES

Hon. John Gerretsen: It's my honour to rise and tell the House about important legislation that, if passed, would ban the sale and use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes across Ontario. This is the first step in Ontario's new toxics reduction strategy, which we announced last November. This proposed bill is designed to protect our people's health, particularly that of our children.

Our government understands that by acting now, by tackling toxics in our air, land and water, and in consumer products, we can help safeguard our environment. More and more, we understand how our health and the health of future generations is linked to the amount of chemicals seeping into our environment. It's up to us all to take a stand and make a difference.

To that point, I would like to acknowledge Jan Kasperski, with the Ontario College of Family Physicians, who is in the gallery today. She's joined by Susan Koswan, Sari Merson and Tania Orton, with Pesticide Free Ontario; Doris Grinspun, of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario; Gideon Forman and Farrah Khan, of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment; and Irene Gallagher, with the Canadian Cancer Society. Welcome to each and every one of them, and thanks for the hard work they have done on this issue.

Jan is the CEO of the Ontario College of Family Physicians, and tells the story of how her grandson was running onto a lawn that had just been sprayed with pesticide. He was too young to read the warning sign. He picked up a ball and put it in his mouth, and became gravely ill. As she states, "We need to choose the health of our children over the odd weed in our yard."

Our government agrees. We listened to Jan and to others throughout the province on this issue. We also listened to medical experts, who have made a convincing case for reducing our exposure to pesticides, particularly for children who are susceptible to the potential harmful effects. Our proposed legislation benefits from their input, as well as from the insight of diverse groups representing environmental, agricultural, industrial and municipal interests, as well as many others.

Our government would like to recognize the good work of the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Cancer Society, Cancer Care Ontario and so many other organizations that fight this terrible disease and support those who suffer. The Canadian Cancer Society has expressed its concern over growing evidence that exposure to pesticides may cause an increased risk of some types of cancer. Numerous other studies have also shown that pesticides can negatively affect human health.

Therefore, since the cosmetic use of pesticide has no health benefit, and does have the potential to cause harm, and since there are environmentally friendly alternatives for lawn and garden care, our government is proposing this ban on both the use and sale of pesticides. Pesticides, including herbicides, insecticides and fungicides, would be banned for use for cosmetic purposes; for example, sprays and chemicals that are applied merely to improve the appearance of lawns, gardens, parks and schoolyards.

The proposed legislation would allow pesticide use in Ontario's agricultural and forestry sectors, since they already have strict rules on the storage and application of pesticides through certification and licensing processes. An exception will also be made for golf courses; however, that exception would only be given if golf courses comply with the requirements set out in regulations that would be made if the legislation is enacted, through integrated pest management programs. It would also allow pesticides to be used, as needed, to ensure public health; for instance, to fight West Nile virus.

If passed, this legislation would authorize the province to develop a regulation listing the specific pesticides and active ingredients in lawn and garden products that would be banned. We're also posting the proposed legislation on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry. We ask that interested parties follow the link on the Ministry of the Environment's home page to review the legislation and provide their comments by May 22 of this year. We hope that the proposed legislation will be passed and a ban will go into effect for the 2009 growing season.

Today we proposed a ban on the cosmetic use and sale of pesticides across the province. This is an important step towards protecting Ontario's children and families from needless exposure to harmful chemicals. I urge all the members of this House to support this legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

PESTICIDES

Mr. Toby Barrett: I will say off the top, on behalf of myself and many of my caucus colleagues, that we support the concept of eliminating, obviously, the non-essential use of pesticides, albeit to protect the health and environment of this province. We might even support this bill—although I see it's only three pages—provided it's not, as we've heard in the media today, public relations puffery, which this government is renowned for.

Now, as far as an outright ban—a ban on the sale and use—well, that's why we have debate. That's why we have public hearings. That's why it's so important to review the literature, to review the research and the evidence.

To be more specific, we support a science-based approach to ensuring our health and environment are protected when it comes to the use of chemicals, not only on our food, but on our parkland, our lawns, our gardens, our farms, our golf courses. This is a very important issue, not to be decided on emotion or based on a gimmick presented during the very important Earth Day celebration that goes back decades and not to be rushed through as a mere three-page bill.

I can also say that to achieve our shared goals, take a look at farmers and what they've achieved in reducing their pesticide use by 52% over the past 15 years, through proper, informed use that stresses the benefits of IPM—integrated pest management. Clearly, we can learn from the example our agricultural producers have set, farmers who are required to go through training and certification every five years, as I think you've just mentioned.

I certainly look forward to debating this legislation's place within the myriad, the constellation, of rules and regulations, legislation that's already in existence, not only here in Ontario but right across Canada.

For instance, in the province of Ontario, pesticides and their use are already regulated federally: The federal Pest Control Products Act controls the sale and use of pesticides in Canada. The Food and Drugs Act allows for the setting of maximum limits for pesticide residue in foods. The Environmental Protection Act includes numerous provisions to protect the environment and human health from injury from pesticides. The Fertilizers Act requires registration of the fertilizer-pesticide mixtures. The Feeds Act is to prevent contamination of livestock feeds. And here, within our own province of Ontario, as we know, we have the Ontario Pesticides Act, we have the Municipal Act, we already have the Weeds Act and the forest sustainability act.

We have met with stakeholders on all sides on this issue in the wake of the government's publication of its proposal on the Environmental Bill of Rights. I do note there's very real concern that emotion does not override what we can learn from science and from experience, from advice and regulations as we see from the federal PMRA—the pesticides management review agency.

I also do note—I hear concerns—that it is important to be clear of definitions of cosmetic use distinguished from curative and public health issues. There's confusion. Are we talking about cosmetic use or cosmetic pesticides? As well, in rural Ontario, the current proposal has led to questions emanating from the possible introduction of a ban on the use of Health Canada-approved pest control products in urban centres, while permitting their use in rural settings. Some do point out that this precedent establishes two standards for health and safety for Ontario residents. Clearly, where our health and the health of our environment are concerned, a double standard is neither desirable nor acceptable.

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Further, I hear in rural Ontario the concern that this proposed legislation may well be a slippery slope. It seems to suggest that there's something inherently wrong with the various herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, and I would go on to mention algaecides and rodenticides, whether they be used in farming, forestry, on golf courses or on homeowners' properties. Is it okay to walk on a sprayed lawn but not on a sprayed golf course? Or, is it okay to eat food that has been treated with some of the products we're discussing today?

PESTICIDES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: New Democrats look forward to ensuring that the bill that's been presented by the minister actually has the teeth to deliver the ban on the aesthetic use of pesticides that Ontarians want.

Let's be clear that praise today should be for Ontario's municipalities, like the city of Toronto, and Ontario's activists, many of whom are here today: the RNAO, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the Ontario College of Family Physicians, and the David Suzuki Foundation—a variety of people who over a long period of time have worked hard to make sure that action would be taken in this province. They've done the heavy lifting on this issue.

It was actually the city of Toronto that, 10 years ago, first brought forward in this province the legislation, and was joined by 30 other municipalities like Oakville, Georgina, Caledon, Guelph, Newmarket, Markham, Vaughan, London and Peterborough. Those were the pioneers. They were the people who went through the heavy-duty fights in the council chambers to make this happen.

In January I had the opportunity to talk to a fellow in London who had been on the other side of this fight when London brought forward its bylaw. He had been a pesticide applicator in the lawn care business. He found that, in the end, when that bylaw came into effect, he did extraordinarily well switching to analysis of lawns and their need for nutrients and feeding lawns with nutrients as a way of having them resist pests and weeds without using herbicides or pesticides—a huge business opportunity for him and a huge business opportunity for this province as a whole.

So it was the city of Toronto and these activists who fought the chemical companies all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. That's what these folks did, and we need to thank them today, on Earth Day. They have been the leaders.

I want to say to you, Speaker, and to those in the gallery who are listening today that they've gone quite a distance. But I have to note to them that an act that was the key recommendation from the Walkerton inquiry, the Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act, has not yet been proclaimed by this government even though it has been passed. So my caution to all of you: You've come quite a distance. This act may well be passed in this Legislature. Will it in fact be proclaimed?

A second point: If proclaimed, will it be enforced? Last year, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario reported widespread non-enforcement of environmental laws in this province. His report was entitled Doing Less with Less. In fact, there are not adequate resources with the Ministry of Natural Resources or the Ministry of the Environment to enforce the laws that are on the books. Those laws that are on the books but going unenforced may just as well not even be on the books.

I have to say to the people in this Legislature and to those who are present in the gallery today that you have to be prepared to go the next few steps to make sure that if legislation is passed that's useful, then you have to make sure it gets proclaimed so that it comes into effect. Then they will have to act to ensure that it is enforced. Those are things that have to happen. It is not good enough to simply put a law on a table, declare a virtue and walk off. The other steps have to be there.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We welcome a number of guests to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the member from Hamilton Mountain, in the east members' gallery: Elyse Bantum.

On behalf of the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, in the east members' gallery: Mark Mackenzie, his Green Party opponent in the 2007 provincial election.

On behalf of a number of members here in the Legislature today, we would like to welcome students from the environmental club from Cathedral High School in Hamilton and their teacher, Mrs. Salciccioli: Cristina Silvestri, Natasha Laroque, Natalie Lolua, Stephanie Santos, Chandal Kilgor, Amy Pachai, Codie Taylor and Linh Hoang. They're located in the east members' gallery.

In the west public gallery, members of the Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology: Roger Courvette, Candy Lindsay, J.L. Roy, Sabrina DeGirolama and Shirley Wood. That's on behalf of the member from Trinity–Spadina.

On behalf of page Michael Thomas-Fulford, we'd like to welcome this afternoon to the west members' gallery: Sally Thomas, his mother; John Fulford, his father; Patrick Thomas-Fulford, his brother; and Patricia Fulford, his grandmother.

On behalf of all the members from the Niagara region—many of them have been introduced—we'd like to welcome the mayors and councillors from the Niagara region visiting Queen's Park for Niagara Week.

On behalf of the Legislature, in the west members' gallery: Mr. Peter Partington, the member from Brock in the 33rd Parliament.

Welcome to all of our guests today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

NATIVE LAND DISPUTES

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I have a question to the Premier regarding the expansion of native protests across Ontario. Over the last number of weeks, Six Nations protestors have been blocking access to a number of construction sites in Brantford. Yesterday, the member from Haldimand–Norfolk raised the fact that Six Nations protesters are now blocking a development on the Ancaster fairgrounds. Yesterday, we learned that native protestors had set up a blockade on County Road 2 in Deseronto, and have been occupying a nearby privately owned quarry for some time.

Premier, whatever your government has been doing in Caledonia for the last two-plus years clearly isn't working. Native protests are expanding. What do you plan to do about this escalating situation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Just as an update to the subject that the member raised, the blockade erected by Mohawk protestors in eastern Ontario has in fact come down. It came down at about 10 a.m. today.

I note as well that the chief of the band council of the Tyendinaga Mohawk Council said yesterday that that council, and he as chief, did not—I repeat, did not—sanction a blockade of the busy southern Ontario highway.

I think it's important to note that, in fact, the blockade is down and that the chief and council exercised some leadership to indicate that this was not something sanctioned by their First Nation. Those streets are now free, and we're pleased that it ended in a peaceful fashion.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We're pleased that it's ended, perhaps temporarily, in a peaceful situation. But the reality is that we're not aware of any charges being laid. By failing to enforce the rule of law in Caledonia and Brantford, and refusing to shut down HDI—which is making what everyone would classify as extortion demands, and may fall under that classification in the Criminal Code of Canada—you are in fact giving tacit consent to further protests and further blockades. Developers are being told by the government not to pay the fees, but you do nothing to stop the situation in Brantford and others areas.

Minister, what are you going to tell the people of Brantford, Ancaster and Deseronto who are worried about their safety, their homes and their businesses? That they should steel themselves, because, as your Premier said to another issue, "This too shall pass"?

1420

Hon. Michael Bryant: I was speaking to Haldimand county council today. In attendance were a number of citizens; obviously, the full council and the mayor were there. Issues around what we are doing next were discussed. The answer is, negotiations are being encouraged that would see those who are on the street and at the work sites come off the street and off the work sites and allow for discussions by way of negotiation.

Based on the recommendations of the Ipperwash commission, it is the recommended course of action not to escalate the tension but rather to de-escalate the tension and, most importantly, to come to a lasting solution. That lasting solution will only happen if the parties sit down and negotiate, and that's exactly the goal that we're pursuing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary. The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington

Mr. Randy Hillier: Premier, your government is creating a culture of violence and confusion. In Napanee and Deseronto, we expect nothing less than one law for every man and injustice for no man. You choose not to protect our communities from armed thugs, nor do you defend legal title to our properties. When will you stand up and protect property, stop the violence and end your policy of different laws for different people?

Hon. Michael Bryant: This comes from a member who—

Interjection: Shot deer out of season.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Well, shot deer out of season and blocked Highway 401.

If I'd closed my eyes, I could have heard the words of Mike Harris, when he said—

Mr. Randy Hillier: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Those are patently untrue. Unless that minister has evidence, I would ask him to withdraw those comments.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's not a point of order, but I do remind the members again to be conscious of their language. We've got a full gallery here again today. Anything that's going to evoke stress within this chamber isn't useful to any of us.

Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker: standing order 23(k)—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member for the reminder.

Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member makes reference to violence. In fact, the most violent confrontation, the one that gave rise to a public inquiry, was the Ipperwash confrontation, and in it, the recommendation from Commissioner Linden was very clear:

"It is inappropriate for the government to enter the law enforcement domain of the police. Law enforcement properly falls within the responsibility of the police. To maintain police independence, the government cannot direct when and how to enforce the law...." It is for the police to decide "whether and when arrests will be made, and the manner in which they will be executed."

We will continue to follow that advice.

ELIZABETH BAIN

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Attorney General. It has to do with the rather extraordinary circumstances surrounding the Robert Baltovich trial and the decision by the crown today to call no evidence and no witnesses. Of course, the judge directed the jury to come in with a not guilty verdict.

To the minister: I think this cries out for some elaboration and explanation. This is almost four years from the appeal court's decision that there should be a new trial. Mr. Baltovich has had his life turned upside down. The Bain family, the parents of Elizabeth Bain, have been twisting in the wind, essentially, for the last number of years. I would ask the Attorney General to elaborate on what happened today and why it happened.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The Leader of the Opposition is correct. This is a tragedy for the Bain family. It's a tragedy for the parents of Elizabeth Bain. They do not have any closure, and my sympathies and, I know, all members' sympathies go out to them.

For Mr. Baltovich, he was found not guilty today, and I hope that he will be able to get on with the rest of his life. As the member knows, and as all members know, a new trial was ordered as a result of an appeal process. There were certain decisions made by the trial judge with respect to the appropriate evidence in light of changes in the law. After those rulings were made, the crown made an immediate determination, based on advice from the chief prosecutor and the head of the criminal law division, that there was not a case to proceed with, indicated that quickly to the court this morning, and the not guilty verdict has resulted.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm not sure when the judge made those as yet unspecified changes, in terms of pretrial evidentiary rules, but it seems passing strange to anyone on the outside that they would go through the process of scheduling court time, empanelling a jury and then standing up and saying, "We're not going to call witnesses; we're not going to present evidence." It seems to me that this could have been dealt with in a much more timely way, and I think it calls out for much more elaboration than the Attorney General has given at this point in time. I again ask him to make an effort here today to explain a more understandable rationale for the decision, especially for Elizabeth Bain's family.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member will want to know that the victim services people have been of assistance to the Bain family throughout these proceedings.

The member is quite right: My understanding of the process is that the trial judge was making ongoing determinations with respect to evidentiary matters, as is not uncommon in cases of this size and complexity. He made some determinations of certain evidence and determined it was not appropriate to be introduced. There were some changes in the law, and as a result of those, the crown made the determination to seek further advice, and got advice from the chief prosecutor, from the director of the criminal law division, and, pursuant to the crown's duty, advised the court that it would not be appropriate to proceed. That is in the highest traditions of the crown office. Quite appropriately, the jury returned the only verdict available, which was not guilty. It had to be done that way, because the hands—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think that the Bain family, whether they are meeting with victim services or not today—not only the Bain family, but the public at large—deserves a more fulsome explanation of what happened here. If there were changes in evidentiary rules and the crown opted no to appeal, based on advice from the chief prosecutor, I think that the public and the Bain family have a right to know. You're not really explaining why it took so long, why it went to this process of getting court time and empanelling a jury.

I would suggest that if it was purely a question of not enough admissible evidence, why not stay the charge while attempting to gather additional evidence? It strikes me that this calls out—this is an extraordinary situation—for a public inquiry. Will the minister commit to doing just that?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As the member knows, this matter has gone through an appeal process, and a new trial was ordered. It was entirely appropriate to proceed with the new trial.

In the course of the new trial advancing, the trial judge made certain evidentiary rulings based on changes in the law. Some of those rulings meant, before the case got too far in, that evidence that the crown thought was going to be available was not appropriate to be introduced. On the basis of those rulings, the crown made the determination it must make. The crown sought advice from the chief prosecutor; the director of the criminal law division determined there was no case to answer.

Again I say this is a tragedy for the Bain family. Our heart goes out to the parents, and our condolences to them. The memory of Elizabeth Bain will not be forgotten. I know the parents will always be wondering. Our hearts do go out to them in this difficult time.

1430

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A question for the Premier: When will you present a fully funded and detailed climate plan for the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my friend, who has a passionate interest in this issue, must have missed much of the good news that we've been putting out in recent times regarding our climate change plan. It includes everything from specific targets to a broad array of approaches that we are taking to arrive at our targets. The single biggest thing that we're doing here in Ontario, which will result in the single largest greenhouse gas reduction in the country, is to phase out coal-fired generation. We're one third of the way there. We look forward to proceeding and achieving more success on

this particular file, but that is the single biggest source reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the entire country, and that's an important component of our plan.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The Premier says he has a plan, yet he's allowing garbage incinerators to go forward that put out 30% more carbon dioxide than coal plants; for gasification we're talking 90%. Why, if you have a plan, are you allowing these greenhouse gas belchers to go forward?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, just so we understand what we're after here, our green targets for greenhouse gas emissions are 6% below 1990 levels by 2014, 15% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. Those are pretty ambitious. Again, we think the single most important feature of that remains our phase-out of coal-fired generation, but there are other components to our plan as well, including Move Ontario 2020. I'd love to have the member opposite's support in this regard. It's the single greatest investment in public transit, not just in the history of our province, but in the history of the country. It's $17.5 billion, which will result in all kinds of new opportunities for people who are presently using cars to remove themselves from the comfort and convenience of their car and to move towards the comfort and convenience of a modern public transit system. Again, that's just one other dimension of a very comprehensive climate change plan.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, all interesting points, but not a plan. Your Minister of the Environment about a month ago said that you would be bringing forward a climate plan in two or three months. Which of you is right?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me just remind the member of some parts of our plan that have been out for some time now. In addition to our green targets for greenhouse gas emissions, we have a green power plan, which is another dimension of our plan—$150 million to assist homeowners in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conserving energy and adopting green technologies. There is Move Ontario 2020, the plan which I just referenced—a $17.5-billion investment in public transit. There's the creating-jobs-by-going-green part of our plan, which includes our $1.15-billion Next Generation of Jobs Fund. There's also another dimension to our plan, our grow green dimension, which is 50 million new trees to be planted in southern Ontario by 2020. Those are just parts of a very comprehensive and very exhaustive climate change plan which we're proud to prosecute on behalf of the good people of Ontario.

GREEN POWER GENERATION

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is for the Premier. The onset of climate change and its implications for the environment and economy will require significant investment in green technologies in areas such as energy generation. Here in Canada, Quebec is home to the sole manufacturer of large wind turbines. Quebec has aggressively pursued investment in new manufacturing facilities through the introduction of a fully refundable manufacturing tax credit. When will the McGuinty government do the same and adopt the NDP's 20% manufacturing investment tax credit to attract green jobs to Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The NDP keeps talking about the refundable tax credit. That's a particular approach, but we haven't adopted that. We've gone with an immediate retroactive cut to capital taxes, which puts results in the hands of our manufacturers immediately.

But I do agree entirely with the member opposite when he says there are economic opportunities to be found in going green. We are the fastest-growing renewable jurisdiction in all of North America. We've got wind turbines popping up around the province. We're putting up the largest solar farm in the world just outside of Sarnia. All of that is good for the economy. It's creating good, new, green jobs and it's going to produce more revenues to support good-quality public services.

Mr. Paul Miller: Last August, the McGuinty government directed the Ontario Power Authority to seek 2,000 megawatts of renewable energy, much of which will come from wind. This is an opportunity to create thousands of well-paying green jobs in Ontario.

Why won't the Premier commit to the NDP's 50% Buy Ontario policy for any future Ontario turbines paid for by the province's hydro taxpayers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I am very proud of our renewable plan. We're certainly leading Canada, if not North America. The OPA, the Ontario Power Authority—it is true: We've gone from, I think, 15 megawatts of wind power four years ago; we now have 500. We've got another 1,300 under contract. We've gone from last to first in Canada in terms of wind generation. On the solar, as the Premier just mentioned, a few days ago we announced a solar plan in Kingston, and we announced a solar plan in Sarnia.

These are real jobs being created to develop these projects, to produce these projects, to construct these projects. We are, as I say, leading the way in North America on clean, renewable energy, creating jobs for that and creating clean, renewable energy for the people of Ontario.

Mr. Paul Miller: The Ontario manufacturing sector has lost more than 200,000 jobs under the McGuinty government. Competing jurisdictions are catching the wave of the green manufacturing as a way to create new well-paying jobs. Last year, there were eight million green jobs in US industries. That attracted $148 million in investment, an increase of 60% from the year before.

Ontario can attract some of these green jobs with a 20% green manufacturing investment tax credit and a 50% Buy Ontario strategy. What is the government waiting for?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: We're not waiting. My colleague the Minister of Research and Innovation has a specific job fund, a job fund to ensure that we encourage manufacturing sectors here for clean, renewable projects.

That's happening. That's a significant financial investment there.

We are also insisting, on behalf of the people of Ontario, on doubling the production of electricity through renewables. As I said earlier, we've gone from virtually no wind to 500 megawatts now and we have another 1,300 coming on stream. These will create jobs; these will create manufacturing jobs. With my colleague the Minister of Research and Innovation, with our future job fund—I think it's $1.2 billion—that too will create real manufacturing jobs for our clean, renewable sector.

We have a leadership role that we're playing. We are doubling the use of renewables that will create effective wind and solar power, but also manufacturing jobs, which we're seeing across the province right now.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Premier. Premier, today you and the three House leaders received a letter from Randy Rath, the president of the Queen's Park press gallery, advising that at their AGM today press gallery members voted unanimously to raise concerns about the timing of question period under your proposed changes to the standing orders.

The letter raises the same concerns that we have raised; that is, that having question period in the morning will limit media access to the Premier and cabinet ministers and will interfere with their filing for noon newscasts.

I ask you today, Premier, are you prepared to seriously consider these concerns and change the timing of question period to 1 p.m., as we suggest?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Yes, this bombshell arrived on my desk this morning. You know, it's one thing to get into a fight with people who print ink by the barrel, but it's another thing to face the wrath of Randy Rath. So it is with shaking hands that I respond to his invitation, where he says he would "welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with you." It's hard to imagine Mr. Rath saying that he'd welcome the opportunity. He'd probably say something—well, I won't say it here. I would welcome the opportunity, of course, to sit down with Randy Rath and with the press gallery and discuss this matter in a fulsome fashion.

1440

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I think all these words ring hollow when you look at the process involved in the discussions with the House leaders. There was no discussion, so your promise to Randy Rath and the gallery probably is the same. But I would ask you today, will you meet with the House leaders and the press gallery this week in order to discuss changing the timing of question period to 1 o'clock in the afternoon so that we can have freedom of the press and make sure that you don't—

Interjections.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: —and that we can ensure that your current plan doesn't move forward, because your current plan, as you know, is attempting to avoid media scrutiny and, in turn, public scrutiny.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I know the Free Randy T-shirts are being printed as we speak. I confess to having some concern with this. The idea that the media wouldn't have access frankly is very troubling to me. So I'm going to have to seriously take a look at this and we're going to have to talk about this further.

In all seriousness, the original proposal in fact was to have a 9:30 question period start, which would have addressed all of these issues, and instead, in response to the opposition, we compromised. The bottom line is that Mr. Rath has asked for a meeting with either himself or the entire press gallery—my preference is the entire press gallery—and I look forward to that meeting.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Attorney General. On August 30, 2007, Minister Bentley, then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, promised to extend collective bargaining rights to college part-time workers and sessionals. Why did the minister, now as the Attorney General, send his lawyer to the labour board last Thursday to argue against these very same workers for those rights?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for his question. It gives me an opportunity to reiterate our government's commitment to extend bargaining rights to part-time workers in Ontario's colleges. The honourable member is well aware of that commitment and our work with Kevin Whitaker, who we commissioned to do a report on this. We thank Mr. Whitaker for his report, which was made public on February 1. We've had an opportunity to review his report and consult with stakeholders, and I hope to be reporting back to the Legislature in the near future.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you, Minister Bentley, for the answer.

I would say that the report of the adviser, Mr. Whitaker, said this to you, government: "Part-time employees should be immediately granted the right to unionize." That's what he said on page 34 of this report. That was 82 days ago and you're still studying the report, it seems.

What we know is that the Ministry of the Attorney General argued strenuously against letting part-timers and sessionals have their say on union representation. That's why the question was to Minister Bentley. Roger Couvrette, president of the provincial organization of part-timers, is here, with many others. He and the thousands and thousands of workers who have signed cards would really like to hear the minister's response: Why did Minister Bentley promise to extend collective bargaining rights to college part-timers and sessionals in

August and, by April, argue against these workers' rights to good wages, benefits and stability?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, we thank Mr. Whitaker for his report and I hope to be reporting back to the House in the near future on living up to the commitment that we made last August. It's funny that in his question, the honourable member forgot to point out that when the NDP were in government, they put forward a bill on this same matter and never let it go beyond second reading.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I regret raising a point of order during question period, but again I refer to standing order 23(k), and I ask the Speaker to reflect upon the reply of the government House leader to the question from the Conservative Party, Mrs. Witmer, with reference to a legitimate communication from the Queen's Park press gallery and his mocking of it. His mocking of it, his trivialization of it, his disregard for that body, representatives of the fourth estate and fifth estate here, is, I submit to you, at the very least the type of abusive and insulting language that's contrary to standing order 23(k).

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I appreciate the member's point of order. I would remind all members that perhaps it's good for all of us to take some time to read the standing orders. I think it would be a good refresher for everyone, because 23(k)—and I say this to all members of the House—is very clear: for any member to use "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder" in this House. I'm not speaking directly to the point he just raised. We had another point raised earlier. I'd just remind all members of 23(k) and trying to maintain some order in this House and language that causes disorder in the chamber.

Hon. Michael Bryant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—obviously not on that point, because you've made a ruling already—I just want to be clear here: Are you making a finding that abusive or insulting language was used in my answer? If not now, then perhaps you would review the transcript and report back to the House. It would be helpful, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I am not directing my comments at any member. I'm asking each of us to think about what we say and how we say it and what it causes within the House. I'd just ask you to think about the language you use.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. The Ontario Institute for Cancer Research is an independent, not-for-profit organization making a huge difference in the lives of Ontarians and people around the world through its focus on prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. I'm proud to say that the institute is partnered with researchers at the McMaster Institute for Molecular Biology and Biotechnology. Will the minister please outline the steps our government is taking to make sure this fundamental part of Ontario's fight against cancer can continue to do its important work?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend from Hamilton Mountain for the question. I would share with her the sobering statistics that one in three Canadian women will develop cancer, one in two Canadian men will develop cancer and one in four Canadians, regrettably, will die from cancer, so I think it falls upon all of us to try to fight cancer.

What we did back in 2005, before the member was here, was that we created the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research. We committed some $347 million over five years to send a clear signal that we wanted the full range of cancer research to be done and coordinated and for our researchers to collaborate so that they weren't duplicating their efforts, and, as you said, with clear goals of prevention, detection, diagnosis and treatment, all in efforts of trying to find a cure.

I'll answer your question in the supplementary. I just want to say, on behalf of all of us to our colleague the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, who himself is recovering from cancer surgery, that we hope, Ted, to see you back shortly.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Dr. Yonghong Wan, at the McMaster Institute for Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, is receiving over $600,000 in funding for research into vaccines that can engage the immune system and attack tumour tissue without harming normal tissue.

At McMaster, rapidly moving research from concept to clinical trials is a priority and is in line with the goals of the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, which looks to quickly turning discoveries into treatments. This funding provides opportunities for internationally renowned scientists to come to McMaster and continue their work, as well as opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to become the groundbreaking researchers of tomorrow. Would the minister outline the ramifications this funding will have locally and globally?

1450

Hon. John Wilkinson: I had the pleasure last week of joining Dr. Tom Hudson, who is the president and the scientific director of OICR, for the announcement of some $60 million worth of cutting-edge, globally significant research. I want to commend Dr. Wan and his team at McMaster for being successful in receiving one of these grants.

We can imagine a day when we can actually be vaccinated against cancer. I say to my friends here, we know that there is a new vaccine for cervical cancer, so that our daughters one day will never have to suffer from cervical cancer as women. I remember last week, we made an announcement with Sanofi Pasteur about their new, $100-million global research centre sited here in Toronto, which is looking for vaccines for melanoma and for colorectal cancer.

I believe that day will be found here in Ontario because of the hard work of our researchers. We commend Dr. Wan and his team for being part of that bright new future.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Madam Minister, under your former adoption disclosure legislation, Bill 183, children's aid societies could file a disclosure veto to protect the identity of victims of severe child abuse who were removed from their parents and then adopted. Your present Bill 12, which is in front of the standing committee, removes that protection, meaning that a child who is raped by her birth father, rescued by the children's aid, and adopted after September 1 of this year will have no way to prevent her natural parents from finding out her adopted identity once she turns 19. Why are you removing this important protection for victims of severe child abuse?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I appreciate the question coming from the member of the opposition party. It's a good question. It's a question that we asked ourselves in drafting this new legislation. But the McGuinty government strongly believes that all Ontarians should be able to learn more about their own personal history. That is why the government has decided to introduce this legislation. The proposed legislation does not include a determination of abuse.

We have discussed this issue with our stakeholders and their advice was that we should treat adults like adults and not like children. So the intent of the proposed legislation is to open adoption records for adults, not children.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: May I quote the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies' submission before the committee: "Children who survive rape as infants, attempted murder, torture, or are starved and exposed to other forms of neglect should be afforded the opportunity to rebuild their lives in loving, adoptive homes. Adoptees should not have to live in fear that the perpetrators of those acts of violence have a legal entitlement"—that's what you are giving them—"to learn their names at age 19 and then track them down...." That's what the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies says.

Why don't you take these people's advice, who have tremendous experience in this area, whom we entrust many of our children to? Why don't you have a heart and protect these children in their adulthood from these very abusive and violent people?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, the proposed legislation does not include a determination-of-abuse process. We have consulted with our stakeholders and the advice that we've received is for open adoption. So this is to modernize the legislation.

We're not the leader in that area. Many provinces across Canada have this type of legislation. It's to open the adoption records, and that's what we're doing. People are allowed to know where they come from. That's what this legislation is doing.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a question to the Premier. The Premier heard the government House leader reply to the question of the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, wherein she referenced a letter that had been written to the Premier by Mr. Rath, the president of the Queen's Park press gallery.

He heard his minister respond in terms that were derisive, mocking, abusive, insulting and an effort to generate cheap laughs. Does he approve of that behaviour on the part of his minister?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, to the House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, I say that the letter that was sent from the press gallery to myself asked for a meeting. I agreed to the meeting. As far as I'm concerned, that's the end of the story. If there were any remarks in there that were in any way mocking, frankly they were self-deprecating to the speaker. I look forward to continued debate on this very, very important matter.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Again, to the Premier: The members of this chamber, as well as scores, if not hundreds, if not thousands of people listened to your minister mock and speak derisively and dismissively of Mr. Rath when Mr. Rath, on behalf of journalists here at Queen's Park, attempted to raise some very serious matters on behalf of, yes, the Queen's Park press gallery.

Will the Premier stand up and condemn his minister for that behaviour?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Speaker, I just want to reinforce that the question that was put in the letter was, in fact, to state a position and ask for a meeting.

Interjection.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm trying to answer the question; the member apparently wants a question, and I look forward to getting it.

I think the gist of this was, can we have a meeting? The answer is yes.

I appreciate the words of advice from the leader of the third party and certainly will be checking Hansard to see the language that he has used in the past—a member who has shown up on the legislative grounds dressed up, literally, in a dog-and-pony outfit, lecturing people in this Legislature about their conduct. I do look forward to having the opportunity—or your having the opportunity, Speaker—to make a ruling on whether or not those words were in violation.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Almost daily, I hear concerns from the constituents of my riding of Mississauga South about the quality of the air we breathe.

Recently, a study was done to look at pollution and particulate matter along the QEW in the Clarkson area and the effect it has on air quality. The Clarkson Airshed Study concluded that we have higher areas of ambient air pollution along the Lakeshore and QEW corridor in my riding of Mississauga South. It has been identified that a great deal of this pollution comes from vehicle congestion on our roads, especially from transport trucks.

On this Earth Day, can the Minister of Transportation please tell the residents of my riding, as well as the House, what the ministry is doing to ensure that air quality in my riding does not get any worse?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to thank the member for an excellent question today. There is no doubt this is an important issue, not only to his constituents but to people across the province. That is why we have moved to address air pollution through our speed-limiter legislation, which is now before the House.

If passed, this legislation will cap the speed of large trucks built after 1995 at 105 kilometres per hour. Studies have shown that between 30% and 60% of large trucks speed in excess of 105 kilometres per hour on the 400-series highways. By limiting speeds, this proposed legislation will—listen to this—allow for a 280,000-tonne reduction in greenhouse gas emissions each year. To put that in perspective, that's like taking 2,700 tractor-trailers off the road each year. It also means conserving more than 100 million fewer litres of diesel fuel by the trucking industry each year. We expect that will reduce us by about 2% in our goal towards—

1500

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Again, to the Minister of Transportation. I would like to applaud him and his ministry on proposing this speed-limiter legislation. I will also be supporting this initiative as it progresses through the legislative process. However, speed limiters on trucks do not address the other concern of congestion on our highways. With studies showing that cars and trucks make up about 26% of greenhouse gas emissions, with close to 50% of that coming from passenger vehicles, can the minister please tell us what is being done to get these cars off the roads?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speed limiters?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, the speed limiter might be put on the member for Timmins–James Bay's car with some justification. I don't know that.

What we are doing is this: We are putting an unprecedented investment into public transit right across the province. You will know now that $314 million was transferred to municipalities this year, in our portion of the gas tax. That was very much appreciated by transit commissions and transit authorities right across the province, including, I can assure you, in the regional municipality of Niagara, Niagara Falls, Welland, Port Colborne, St. Catharines and those places.

Also, you know we have the $17.5-billion rapid transit action plan for the greater Toronto area to reduce that challenge that we have. We know this will help build a strong, prosperous economy, and we're investing this in every municipality in Ontario to reduce the use of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PLANT CLOSURE

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: On Friday, the remaining 120 workers at CanGro in Niagara were summoned to hear the very unfortunate news that the deal to purchase and invest in the facility fell through, and they would be out of work. The Premier knows a private sector consortium, led by respected Niagara business leaders, was bringing about $20 million to the table to keep the plant open and was looking for provincial support. Premier, why did the province of Ontario walk away from the table and allow CanGro to close?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll speak to the first question; I know my colleague will want to speak to the supplementary.

Let me tell you that we worked as hard as we possibly could to pull out all the stops, to find a way to bring parties to the table and to ensure that parties might be willing in terms of ensuring some kind of succession plan for this business. We know this is really tough on the families. We have a number of programs in place, close to $2 billion now by way of special programs, including our Next Generation of Jobs Fund. I know that the minister could speak to the details of this, but my advice to my colleagues was to do everything we possibly could to see if we might land some kind of a succession plan for this particular enterprise. Unfortunately, it was not there. We could not make it happen. It is with great regret that the ensuing result has been made apparent, but we will work as hard as we can with those workers in that community, and throughout Ontario, to find new jobs.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I say to the Premier that municipal leaders, business leaders and tender fruit growers would have a completely different view, indeed, about the lack of activity of the province of Ontario to try to save this plant. The Premier also knows that this impacts on some 150 growers representing 2,600 acres of pear and peach land in the peninsula. They're now being pulled out of the ground.

Premier, when it comes to the greenbelt, you have become an absentee landlord. You find a way to give Magna Corp. some $50 million, and they're paying their CEO some $40 million per year. Last week, you gave a foreign-owned pharmaceutical plant some $14 million, despite their $4 billion in international sales.

Premier, I ask you, why do you give big grants to foreign-owned multinationals, but walk away from tender fruit growers and workers in Niagara?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm very happy to address this, and I want to say first off that the very premise of the member's supplementary question simply is not

based in fact. I have to say that we have had ongoing discussions on a personal level, both my ministry and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, with Lord Mayor Burroughs. There are members who are leaders from the Niagara region who are in the House today who will attest to the work that we in my ministry have done on a personal level on this particular issue. We have worked very hard to try to keep CanGro in operation in the Niagara region as the last remaining canning opportunity here in Ontario.

When we were at the table, making the offers that we have made, we needed to have the company at the table with us. Unfortunately, CanGro was not in a position to want to work with the numbers of people that we brought to the table to try to do a deal. That's a very unfortunate outcome. We will work very diligently with the economic commission of the Niagara region, as we have in the past. The leadership is here today that will prove that that has in fact been the case and will continue to be the case, to find good jobs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines: Can the minister tell us why the McGuinty government is awarding Platinex Inc. new mining rights to 72,000 acres of land in northern Ontario while First Nations leaders from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug who oppose mining exploration on their traditional lands are sent to jail?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'm not in a position to comment on that, in the sense that I'm not aware of any particular permits that have been given to any other land that's out there. In terms of the situation with Platinex and KI, we very much regret the situation that has resulted from the legal challenges, and I'm not able to comment on those either. In terms of your specific question, I'm not aware of any such arrangement being made.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, I—

Hon. David Caplan: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: Standing order 23(g) says that the Speaker shall call a member to order if they refer to a matter that is subject to "a proceeding that is pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination."

I believe the member has just done this. His House leader, earlier today, referred to standing order 23(k). I ask for your ruling in this matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): A couple of points on the point of order. First, as Speaker, I'm not aware that it is an issue that is before the courts right now. As well—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I recognize and thank the finance minister for his comment. I also recognize that the leader of the third party, in his questioning, I'm sure, is going to be conscious that it's not going to in any way interfere in any proceedings.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm simply referring to historical fact now. Historical fact is that the leadership of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation are in jail. They're in jail because they stood up for their constitutional rights to be consulted and accommodated before mining rights were handed out to a mining exploration company.

On the other hand, Platinex, the company which sued the First Nation for $10 billion and almost bankrupted the First Nation, is getting an additional 72,000 acres of mining rights from the McGuinty government, mining that would involve Webequie First Nation, Marten Falls First Nation, Fort Hope First Nation, Neskantaga First Nation and Gull Bay First Nation.

I'm simply asking, is this the message the McGuinty government wants to send to First Nations, that if you stand up and ask for your constitutional rights to be recognized, you can go to jail while the mining company gets mining rights half the size of the city of Toronto?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: There is no confirmation of these particular permits or claims. I have no confirmation of that, but regardless, we continue to work in terms of respecting our duty to consult. That's been an important factor for us. It was acknowledged that, indeed, we met our duty to consult. We absolutely feel terrible about the situation in terms of KI and what has resulted in terms of the court case, but again, I can't discuss that in any detail.

We continue to work—there are some great stories out there in terms of First Nations working very co-operatively and positively with mining companies. Memorandums of understandings have been signed, and impact benefit agreements have been signed with a number of First Nations. We have a great example in the Victor Diamond Mine in Attawapiskat, again, in terms of a process whereby there are very positive impacts for First Nations communities. Certainly I don't think there need to be the constant attempts to be very negative about something that could be very positive for many, many First Nations in the north.

1510

MINING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. I have heard some very negative comments coming from the opposition benches that Ontario is not a desirable mining jurisdiction. They say that Ontario is not a good place to invest. It sounds to me like they're getting their cues from another Ontario politician who holds a similarly pessimistic view of this great province.

I must ask the minister this question: What is the status of mining in Ontario and how do we stack up against other jurisdictions?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I thank the member from Huron–Bruce for the question. Everyone in the House will know that the largest salt mine in North America is in Huron–Bruce, in Goderich, and that's a fabulous story.

Interjection.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Yeah, that's good news.

Certainly we know that mining is being received very positively in terms of the economic impact. We know that Ontario's mineral production increased to $10.7 billion in 2007—a record level. We know that Ontario is forecast to lead the country in mineral exploration in 2008, with over $629 million in exploration. We also know that mining sustains some 100,000 direct and indirect jobs in the province and is a supplier of all the raw materials that drive 21st century society.

As I said in my earlier remarks, as well we have the first-ever diamond mine in the province of Ontario, the Victor diamond mine. So we're very keen about the fact that mining is indeed one of the great places in terms of the economy of Ontario, and we're very proud of that fact.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you, Minister, for providing that information. I'm very heartened to hear that the industry is showing such investment in Ontario and that we indeed are attracting that investment. They are truly impressive figures, and a great level of activity on the industry side as well.

I know that the mining sector is one of truly province-wide importance. From the salt mine in Goderich to the diamond mine in Attawapiskat to the trading floor of the Toronto Stock Exchange, it covers from border to border.

What I'm also interested in specifically is what the McGuinty government is doing to foster growth in the sector and also to address the issues that mining is facing today.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Again, I thank the member from Huron–Bruce and I look forward to visiting your salt mine next month.

I want to assure the House that my ministry is hard at work to meet the challenges head-on and maintain an attractive investment climate here in Ontario. To that end, one of the things we are doing is undertaking a review of the Mining Act. We have initiated public discussions about improving consultation with our First Nation communities, and in fact we've already implemented some transitional measures based on what we've heard.

We're also very proud to say that we've launched Ontario's first-ever mineral development strategy—greatly supported in our 2008 budget—as well as a four-year, $20-million geological mapping initiative that will bolster Ontario's mineral exploration sector and identify new areas of economic opportunity. Certainly we're very proud of that, as well as our abandoned mines rehabilitation program: $90 million committed by our government over the last six years, working very closely—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Norm Miller: A question for the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. The Ontario Convenience Stores Association estimates that as many as half of Ontario's 10,000 convenience stores will not be able to comply with the new retail display ban on tobacco products set to take effect on May 31. My question is simple: Will the minister help these convenience store owners by extending the deadline to comply beyond May 31?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member for asking the question. I know he has an interest in this issue.

I said in the House last week that we have been working very closely with the Ontario Convenience Stores Association and also with the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. I had the chance to meet with them last week and we will continue to work with them. If there are issues, we will sit with them and work out those issues. It is in our interest to do that because they contribute enormously to the prosperity of our province.

Mr. Norm Miller: Does the minister not see it as his job to assist small businesses, especially in light of the fact that the government waited until this January before it issued its guidelines? In Belleville, workshops designed to help retailers only started yesterday. You gave store owners weeks, not years, to comply. Convenience stores should not be penalized because this government failed to act until the last minute. I've now asked six times to provide more help for these store owners, and still you refuse to do so.

If the minister is truly committed to helping small businesses, he will extend the deadline and give store owners enough time to avoid being hard hit by this government's heavy-handed enforcement. Will he make that commitment today? Will he extend the deadline? Will he finally do something to help small businesses in this province?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I am very proud of our small-business community, and we have been working very closely with them.

I read a statement in the House last week from Dave Bryans, president of the Ontario Convenience Stores Association. Let me just read it again. He said:

"I would like to take this opportunity to briefly thank you for all the help and support that you, your cabinet colleagues and the Premier have given to Ontario's independent family-run convenience stores.... As I have said in the past, all OCSA members will comply with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act."

I have great confidence in our small-business community, and we continue to work with them and will address their issues if they face any problems complying with this legislation.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The fire at the Biedermann packaging plant in Hamilton sent tonnes of pesticides and other harmful toxins into Spencer Creek, killing thousands of fish initially, and ultimately endangering children, pets and the broader ecosystem. Why is the McGuinty gov-

ernment keeping information about the toxic Biedermann fire secret, while refusing to call a full public inquiry into the environmental disaster? Ten years later, has nothing been learned from the 1997 Plastimet fire?

Hon. John Gerretsen: As I've indicated to this member before, right after the Biedermann fire, there were a number of tests done over the next month or so that indicated that the amount of toxins that were in the water as a result of the fire were being reduced at all times.

As a matter of fact, we continue to work with the city of Hamilton, we continue to work with the enforcement branch that's been out there as well, to make sure that everything is as best as it can possibly be. It's my understanding that about a month after the fire, in effect, the water quality was roughly the same as it was when the fire first happened. But we continue to be concerned about it. We continue to monitor the situation and work with the city of Hamilton on this particular issue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister should know that "just trust us" doesn't cut it in Hamilton. I've been trying to get the Biedermann fire reports from this minister's office since February using freedom-of-information laws. I was promised the material by April 18, which was last Friday, but only if an unnamed third party gave approval for that release. The legal deadline has come and gone, and still no information from this minister's office.

The McGuinty government continues to interfere with the community's right to know what happened that day and what has happened subsequently. What I want to know is, what dirty environmental secret is the minister trying to hide? Why not hold a public inquiry?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member to withdraw the comment, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdrawn.

Hon. John Gerretsen: As the member well knows, our toxics reduction law that we intend to introduce as a result of some of the work that we're doing in the whole toxics area—as a matter of fact, today is a good day. Today, we introduced a bill that will ban the cosmetic use of pesticides and the sale of them throughout this province. But as she well knows, and as I've indicated to her a number of times, our toxic reduction law will include the right-to-know law.

We will continue to work with this particular member on the issue of the Biedermann fire, which I know is of great concern to her. I will make sure that the information that she's talking about will be released to her as soon as we can do it, after we've spoken to our legal experts within the ministry. We will continue to work with this member to make sure that she has all the information she requires.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Mike Colle: My question is to the Minister of Labour. This government places the highest priority on the hard-working people of Ontario, as we all do in this House, and it's committed to making sure workplace health and safety is a given for all Ontario workers. This government takes seriously, I hope, its responsibilities as a full partner in workplace health and safety in Ontario. We certainly cherish our hard-working citizens who pay taxes and put bread on their tables.

I'd like to hear from the Minister of Labour just exactly what this government is doing to protect, on an everyday basis, the health and safety of Ontario's workers.

1520

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member very much for his question and for his advocacy to help this government improve the health and safety of workplaces right across this province.

I guess it was in 2003, about four years ago, that the previous Minister of Labour set a goal of a 20% reduction in workplace injuries. At the time it was seen as too dramatic and very risky, but this government was determined, working with our partners in the health and safety sector, to reach that goal. I'm very pleased to say that we're well on the way to reaching that 20% reduction goal.

But it's not something we can do alone; it's something we've had to do with our partners. Just yesterday I was at the Industrial Accident Prevention Association conference—over 6,000 people attending, 350 exhibits. These people were not just inspired, they were inspiring to all of us. They're dedicated to working with our government to improve the health and safety in workplaces right across this province. We're proud of their efforts and we're proud to work with them.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity to welcome the former member from Brampton North in the 36th Parliament and the member from Brampton Centre the 37th Parliament, Joe Spina. Joe is in the west members' gallery. Joe, welcome back to Queen's Park today.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Randy Hillier: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: the government House leader, earlier in today's proceedings, accused me of shooting and killing deer out of season. I said it was patently false and untrue and I ask that minister to withdraw the remark. It is false. If he has evidence, I ask him to turn around and speak to the Attorney General and have me charged. Otherwise, come out of the House and say it, Mr. Minister. I would ask the Speaker to review Hansard and censure that minister for his allegations.

Hon. Michael Bryant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In the Belleville Intelligencer of December 15, 2005, a picture of a dead deer with cabinet minister Leona—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member to come to order. Minister of Transportation.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask all members to come to order.

I will take a look at the Hansard. I would remind members that, at the immediate time, if they have concern with an issue, they should rise and speak directly to the issue that they take exception to. But in this case, because of a number of comments that were made today—and it's not a practice that I want to engage in on a regular basis, reviewing Hansard of all members, because as a Speaker I cannot hear every comment that is made within the chamber—I will take a look at it.

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: You're a liar.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment that he just made, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Mr. Speaker, I have much respect here—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the member to withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw the comment.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition from the First Christian Reformed Church in Owen Sound and it's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I have signed this and I will give it to Georgia.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have a petition signed by hundreds of people, some of whom are here in the gallery, and I've got thousands of other people in an informal petition that is not accepted by this assembly but there are thousands of people who have signed it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas car culture has destroyed and alienated our communities and dominated our public space; and

"Whereas equitable mobility is a right and transportation is a need to all, including the young, the elderly and those who refuse to drive; and

"Whereas Ontario is sorely lacking in infrastructure for active and public transportation (i.e., in most of the province there's no choice but to drive a car); and

"Whereas a reported 26% of Ontario's economy is directly linked to an auto manufacturing sector that year after year has proven volatile and unsustainable, requiring billions of dollars in government loans and subsidies, under the constant threat of layoffs of thousands of workers at a time; and

"Whereas Ontario has covered hundreds of thousands of acres of our country's most fertile farmland with concrete highways and suburban housing developments; and

"Whereas our imported food supply is increasingly threatened in this time of climate change; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment issued 39 smog alerts in 2007, a year with 86 days of air quality worse than 30 AQI (air quality index); and

"Whereas pollution from smog is directly linked to asthma, breast cancer and leukemia, and the sedentary lifestyle of the auto-dependent is linked to the epidemics of diabetes and obesity that increasingly plague our country; and

"Whereas Toronto Public Health reports that 440 deaths per year in the city of Toronto are directly linked to pollution from cars, and the Ontario Medical Association estimates 5,800 deaths yearly in Ontario from smog; and

"Whereas the Canadian Institute of Child Health cites traffic injuries as the leading cause of injury and death in Canadian school children; and

"Whereas billions of dollars are currently spent on the health system to treat accident victims and victims of smog, and on treatment of disease linked to our society's reliance on the automobile; and

"Whereas financial decisions made by the Ontario government have a drastic impact on global climate change and the ability of our biosphere to support life;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Stop any tax breaks, subsidies or loans to the automotive sector; and

"Create a public awareness campaign exposing the ill effects of automobile dependency; and

"Ban the advertising of automobiles, just like cigarettes; and

"Immediately allocate money to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, public transit and an intercity train system, including programs to help shift our labour force into these sectors; and

"Amend the Highway Traffic Act, making street closures for community festivals distinct from closures for general road construction; and

"Put a halt to development projects that do not support the use of public and active transportation; and

"Create programs to encourage the development of small-scale mixed organic and natural farming of food for the local market, with tax breaks for hiring labour instead of labour-saving, pollution-creating machines; and

"Measure the cost of all government spending with a triple bottom line, including social, environmental and economic impact"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Would the member care to summarize the conclusion of the petition, please?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Okay. The conclusion is, "Make policy decisions considering the value of life over the value of money."

I appreciate your tolerance.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles. This petition is in tandem with Bill 56 introduced on Thursday by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. This petition reads as follows:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

Since I agree with this petition 100%, I am delighted to sign it.

1530

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Mr. Currie Phillips, from Elmvale, for sending me this petition:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I agree with this petition, and I have signed it.

HOME CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to present a petition from the SEIU union and the people of Hamilton and Burlington.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We call on the government of Ontario:

"(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I agree with this petition and hereby sign it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East local health integration network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, its largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact on the quality care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I shall affix my signature to that and give it to Ida.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank Rev. Rose LeClaire for forwarding this petition to me, on behalf of herself and her congregation.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition and send it to the table with page Adam.

DISABLED PERSONS PARKING PERMIT PROGRAM

Mr. Michael A. Brown: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there currently exist problems of exposure to theft and the weather when displaying a disabled person parking permit on a motorcycle while parked in a disabled parking space;

"We, the undersigned, petition our members of Parliament to promote the development of a special, fixed permit as proposed by the Bikers Rights Organization, for use by disabled persons who ride or are passengers on motorcycles, even if that requires an amendment to the Highway Traffic Act."

I agree with this petition and thank the Bikers Rights Organization and, in particular, Michael Warren from Iron Bridge for this.

HOME CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU and the people of Cambridge, Guelph and Kitchener.

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We call on the government of Ontario:

"(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I support this petition and send it with Bethany.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support it, and I've signed the petition.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition that's been sent to me by Dennis Foerster from R. R. 1, Neustadt. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature"—

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Mr. Speaker, I have heard that this may not be true and that the Minister of Transportation has said this, so I hope in his statement he will correct this and that that will be fine. We'll listen for his statement.

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I have signed this. I'm sure that the Minister of Transportation will agree with me and will—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 21, 2008, on the amendment to the motion by Mr. Bryant to amend the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When we last dealt with this matter, I understand the member for Hamilton Centre had the floor. I return to the member for Hamilton Centre.

1540

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I certainly did have the opportunity—I think it was just yesterday—to make a few remarks on the standing order changes that the government's brought forward. I think much of my remarks yesterday focused on a little bit of frustration around the government's lack of consultation and/or acknowledgment with a particular committee that was set up to undertake a particular job, and that is to talk about how to make this place more amenable to family relationships for all of the members who are privileged to sit here and represent the people of their riding.

Unfortunately, as people who watched yesterday's proceedings will know, the government has not only not consulted with that committee but they haven't even really officially struck the committee. Myself and a member from the Conservative caucus were eagerly awaiting that call to arms, if you will, in terms of trying to obtain the opportunity to sit and have a dialogue about these issues. Unfortunately, the government never did see fit. To this day, April—what's the date? April 22; something like that?—the government has still not seen fit to have that committee meet. So notwithstanding the government couching this in terms of anything to do with families, the reality is, and I think everyone knows, it's got little, if anything at all, to do with that.

But having said that, I'll set that aside, because I did deal with those issues in my remarks yesterday. Just this very day, just a few shorts moments ago, we learned in this House that it's not only the Conservative caucus and not only the New Democratic caucus that have some concerns about these standing order changes; in fact, the government House leader was provided with correspondence from the press gallery. The Queen's Park press gallery are the people whose job it is to report on the happenings of this very place and to ensure that the public gets information about what happens here through various media sources of all kinds: print media, television media, radio media—

Mr. Jim Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm just wondering if we have quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The table will ascertain if there's a quorum.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member for Hamilton Centre.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's an interesting request for a quorum count because the suspicion is—many people here think that once the new rules come into place, quorum won't be able to be obtained very often under the new rules. There will be members, particularly on Thursdays, who won't be bothered to stay here for something that the government pretends is being lofted up to some kind of very high degree of import in terms of expanding this section of our agenda, which people in the community might know as private members' bills.

The government is suggesting that adding a third private member's bill time slot in debate is raising the profile or highlighting the import of private members' public business. But I have got to tell you, it's been our experience, and in particular the experience of my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, that once a private member's bill is debated in second reading here in this chamber, the next piece of the process is that it goes to committee. In the committee process then, there's a discussion about how to handle the bill. The way it normally works, because government has the majority of people in the committees, is that the government business is brought to the top of the heap in terms of priority within the committee. People understand that; it's part of the process.

In this particular committee, Bill 6 was brought forward and there was no other business on the committee agenda—no other business. There were no government bills. There was nothing else for this committee to do, save and except lonely little Bill 6, which was brought forward by my colleague from the Hamilton area, the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. Lo and behold,

what happens when this committee is charged to meet and deal with bills that come before it? What happens? Of course, you would think what normally happens is that the committee would do the job that it is struck to do, which is to bring forward this bill and go through the process of public hearings, of clause-by-clause, and eventually get it back to this House for third reading debate.

But lo and behold, this particular private member's bill, again, private members' bills that this government is pretending—if people recall yesterday, when I made these remarks, the government House Leader did talk about how private members' business was going to become oh so much more important. I said yesterday, and I repeat today, that the government House leader was talking a big, big fish tale when he was talking about what he thought these standing orders meant. I think everyone around this chamber would agree that it was a big fish tale, because it has nothing to do with vaulting private members' business into greater import because now there are three bills that are going to be debated instead of two.

We saw what happened with Bill 6; I'll go back. The fact that the government members of the committee—just like in this chamber, all of the committees have a majority of government members. It's all proportionate: Just like they have a majority in the House, they also have a majority in committee. So in the committee, the government members decided that they didn't want to know anything about Bill 6. They didn't care about Bill 6. They didn't care that the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek had actually worked really hard to put Bill 6 together. They didn't want to hear anybody from the province of Ontario who might be interested in Bill 6. Let me tell you what Bill 6 is about. Bill 6 is about justice for workers. Bill 6 is about making sure that workers have economic justice when it comes to situations they have no control over around the closing of their plants.

I think that's important. I guess, coming from Hamilton, I would think that's important. You would think that every single member of this Legislature who has a single plant that has closed in their riding would at least think it was important to hear from workers across the province, and from people who represent workers across the province, as to the efficacy of Bill 6, which might help workers across the province. But just like this Premier refuses to deal with job losses in this province, their committee—a majority of government members—refused to deal with Bill 6, a bill to deal with the pain and suffering currently being felt by many, many a family across the province of Ontario and particularly in the area of Hamilton and other industrial-type cities. But no, they didn't want to hear from this member—this member's private member's bill—they didn't want to hear from workers across the province and they didn't want to hear anything at all that had to do with any kind of solution or any kind of effort to help workers in this province, and shame on them.

For the government House leader to get up and pretend that these standing orders changes have anything to do with private members' business, I think, is a bit of a stretch of the truth, and that's where that fish tale comes in, right? The fish is really this big, and by the time the tale about the fishing trip gets told, the fish is actually this big. I have to tell you, even though the member from Timmins–James Bay has lots of fish in his riding, as does the member from Nickel Belt, who is joining me in this afternoon's debate, it's not appropriate for the government House leader to tell fish tales when it comes to what these standing orders changes really mean.

In fact, even though three bills will be debated with the new changes, when now only two are, what the government House leader is not telling you is that those bills get shorter shrift. We used to have an hour to debate a private member's bill, and under these new changes, we might get 45 minutes. We're getting shorter shrift. We're being cut back by 15 minutes apiece. I don't know if the government backbenchers know that their private members' bills not only don't get an hour's hearing anymore—they only get 45 minutes—but also that they get 45 minutes on the very last day of the week in the afternoon, when the vast majority of people are not going to be inside this Legislature. They're not going to be here.

In fact, speaking of ringing the quorum bell, I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts that on a Thursday afternoon when we're here debating private members' business, we're going to have quorum bells constantly, because nobody is going to be here listening to your lowly little private member's bill, and you're not going to be able to get a whole bunch of people here to cheer on your private member's bill. The media are going to be long, long gone; they're not here on Friday. They're not going to care a bit about your private member's bill. Government backbenchers be warned: Your private members' bills are going down the tubes with your government's changes to the standing orders.

I've had enough to say. Our leadoff speech is coming from our House leader a little bit later on, and we look forward to those remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to indicate today that I'll be sharing my time—oh, I'm on a two-minute. I'm watching the clock here.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: No, you're on your 20 minutes. There are no questions and comments.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Okay, I'm on my 20 minutes—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member has the floor, and I look forward to your comments.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to share my time with the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and I'm pleased to talk about the amendments to the standing orders.

I'll focus my remarks on the hours of sitting, which currently extend regularly into the evening. For me, the

most important amendment we are making to the rules of procedure of this House will be changing the primary sitting hours to normal business hours: 9 to 5:45, with evening sittings being limited to the last eight days of the spring and fall sessions, much more like those of us who have had the opportunity and privilege to work in other fields, where we work primarily during the day, as do our constituents.

1550

I want to lend my voice, with respect to the proposed amendments to the standing orders, to the pilot project. In my view, these changes will have a positive impact on the willingness of women to run for provincial office, their willingness to stay, to contribute and to succeed in the political realm—a role which I've been privileged to serve in and continue to serve in on behalf of my constituents in Etobicoke–Lakeshore and one in which I think women have made over the years, and will continue to make, a strong impact.

When we talk about balancing our work life and our family life, I guess it's something that we're always in search of. As a mother of two two-and-a-half-year-old boys, I don't know that I have the secret to finding that balance. I think the reality is that it's a very difficult thing to achieve. I think we can best describe it as trying to integrate two things that you love passionately—your work, your family—and that you try to balance ebb and flow throughout your career, throughout your children's lives, back and forth; and that you, hopefully, by the end of your life have achieved a life with some balance.

A family-friendly approach for the governance of the Legislature is one to make it easier for women to make the decision to run for public office in the first place. If we do that as a society, as a province, as a Legislature, we will benefit from the tremendous contribution that women will make in political life. The laws will be better. They'll be more inclusive when we have greater diversity in this place.

I don't say that as someone who's trying to make us feel good, or from the perspective of being a do-gooder, but I think it's something that we can certainly learn from business, because it is a model that business has studied and business has learned over the years.

I want to share with you a business concept that has been really expanded by the business writer James Surowiecki. I'm reading now and I certainly encourage folks to take a look at this book by a Harvard law prof, Off-Ramps and On-Ramps. It really studies the career trajectory of women.

"James Surowiecki writes: 'The basic premise is that diverse teams make better decisions.'

"Surowiecki assembles a great deal of evidence to show that homogeneous groups become progressively less able to investigate alternatives, to bring new and different people into an organization, and even if they are less experienced, they actually make the group, as a whole, smarter, simply because what they know is not the same as what everyone else in the group knows.

"A woman who grew up on the wrong side of the tracks and attended a small Baptist college has had very different life experiences from an upper-class white male who attended Yale. Introduce this woman into a group of Ivy League-educated men and the thinking will change. Any kind of difference—race, class or gender—can have this kind of effect."

I think that business model is one that we can learn and have observed in this Legislature as to the benefit of bringing diverse voices, diverse perspectives, to the table. We can learn a great deal from business leaders and corporations across North America and around the world who have sought to go the extra mile to ensure that women succeed within their business organizations.

You can name a few: Ernst and Young, Lehman Brothers, Johnson and Johnson, Cisco, General Electric. Many of those companies—again, outlined in this very extensive analysis by Professor Hewlett—have gone the extra mile to find ways to help women balance their careers. In so many of those instances, the very request made by women who had highly demanding, challenging jobs, as we do, as legislators—what they asked for was the opportunity to spend that critical time with their children from 6:30 to 8:30. They sought that flexibility.

I would have to say that for me, with young children, as I know my colleague across the House, who also has young children, has said, you're up early, you're ready to be here, you're hard-working, you love your job, but you love your kids. And when you don't get home for that 6:30 to 8:30 time slot, it is so critical. I notice a real difference in my ability to spend quality time with my kids when I miss dinnertime, when I miss bath time, when I miss bedtime. It's a real struggle to find that balance that we're always searching for.

I want to just talk a little bit about some of the other institutions similar to this. I know that my friends across the House might say, "You can't compare litigation"—which is what I did before coming to this place—"and courtroom hours to what we do here." I would suggest to you that you can, to a great extent, contrast and look at and find similarities among a number of hard-working professions.

I know we all work in our community in after hours attending events, giving speeches, but we make the decision and it's not imposed upon us to be here filling time until 9:30 in the evening. I would suggest that if we don't think we can make these changes here, we should look to the parliamentary systems which we have inherited and brought into Ontario.

I have an article from 1999: "Scottish Parliament Puts on a Friendly Face.

"A report released Friday recommended the new Scottish Parliament make a clean break from many of the steeped-in-tradition ways Westminster clings to—and the Parliament in Ottawa inherited and still uses."

Members will have "more sociable hours than their Westminster counterparts, who have the mornings off but often sit late into the" evening. "The Parliament will

meet during normal office hours and observe ... school holidays." Late-night sittings will be gone.

If we look to other Canadian jurisdictions, we are not the first to tackle this issue. Many of our other provinces don't have as regular sitting hours as we do into the evenings.

I just want to take a look at it and say, why do we need to do this? Yes, we have more women in the Legislature, and that is a good thing. But the reality is that the underrepresentation of women in Canadian politics has been documented time and time again. Royal commission after royal commission has examined this issue. In Canada, we are now hovering in and around and capping out at about 20% to 21% of women. The United Nations notes that a critical mass of at least 30% to 35% of women is needed before Legislatures produce public policy reflecting women's priorities and before changes in management style, group dynamics and organizational culture will take place.

We can look to other jurisdictions around the world, such as Sweden, which has 47.3% women parliamentarians. They've enjoyed that gender balance increasing from the 1970s. By 1985, they were up to 31%, and now they're at 47%. Swedish political scientists would now say that it is "unthinkable to form a government ... with fewer than 40% women."

So I think it's important to note that the Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag, parliamentary schedule is structured to provide balance between work, family and political activity, and their calendar reflects that.

I would say, as I come to the close of my statement today, that if women are prepared to give themselves to public life—and I think we will all benefit from increased diversity and representation—frankly, as parliamentarians, we benefit from having a balanced life, from being able to be out in our community, to be in the grocery store, to be with our kids, to understand the lives that our constituents lead and be connected with them. That will make this place a much better place for everyone. If we improve the quality of life and improve the quality of debate and we bring more efficiency and modernization to this place, we will all benefit.

I'll just close with reading one more segment of this book by Professor Hewlett. When she talks about women who are in extreme careers and the fact that businesses are seeing it as important to try to ensure that we do things—small things, large things—to make sure that they stay, she quotes Patricia Fili-Krushel, the executive vice-president of administration at Time Warner and the co-chair of a task force entitled the Hidden Brain Drain Task Force. She says, "These women who leave or languish, are, in effect, the canaries in the coal mine, the first and most conspicuous" casualties "of an outdated, dysfunctional career model." She went on to enumerate that there are other casualties: "58-year-old baby boomers who don't want to retire but are no longer willing to put in 70-hour weeks; and 28-year-old Gen X and Y men who want to be better, more involved fathers than their dads were, and need flexible work."

So I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that although I brought to the floor of this Legislature a very personal story today about my desire to be a good MPP for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, to be a good legislator and contribute in this place, it is a challenge to do that and be here in the evening. I would suggest that, as perhaps a canary in the coal mine, we will all have better quality in our lives, and that will make us better in this place if we modernize the way we do business here.

1600

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for sharing her 20 minutes with me this afternoon. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments on the motion standing before us today, which at its core is attempting to bring some reform into how business is conducted in this Legislature, as I understand it for the first time in five or 10 years.

I'm told that both governments that preceded us, both of other political stripes, brought in some of their own reforms in the early 1990s and then in the mid to late 1990s and early 2000s. So what is occurring here today is not necessarily the first time that anything like this has happened in the recent past. In fact, other governments of other political stripes have found reason to do the same thing that we are doing here today.

I believe that some of the people who are watching on television today may be watching for the first time and may be unsure as to what we are actually discussing and may have some uncertainty around why there seems to be some opposition from the opposition parties.

I'm going to read the motion quickly. It goes as follows:

"At 12:01 a.m. on the first Monday following adoption of this motion, the standing orders as amended shall come into force on a provisional basis until 11:59 p.m. on the fourth Friday, following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008.

"The provisional standing orders shall be deemed to be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, which is authorized to conduct a review of the standing orders during the 2008 summer adjournment of the House. The committee shall present its report to the House containing its opinions, observations and recommendations on the standing orders of the assembly no later than the first Thursday following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008."

I think it's important to read that because two of the reasons we've heard, or two of the positions put forward for opposing this, are that there might be some permanency around this issue and that there has not been a lot of consultation.

I would offer quite the opposite. As the motion clearly indicates, I'm not sure how much more consultation you can have than to have this motion referred, should it pass, to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly that's going to hold consultations around the province this summer, in 2008. I'm not sure how much more consultative we can be than that. As the first part clearly states, this is, by any definition, a pilot, and we'll have

the opportunity to further review this as we move forward.

To further express a bit of a contradiction, I think it's important once more to read into the record the position of the leader of the official opposition, who was crystal clear during the last election when he told voters of his support for family-friendly changes to the Legislature: "You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock in the morning.... I think, if you had the sitting start in the morning and finish at suppertime, it allows moms and dads and young families to be home more often with their family and to have the thing just a bit more family friendly. So I think it means you'd look more often to start in the morning and have your day proceed so that you could use those hours and finish by suppertime." There's clearly a bit of a contradiction going on from both sides.

I want to offer a few comments in the short time that I have on primarily what I see as two fundamental pieces in this legislation: One is night sittings and the other is the suggestion by some that we are attempting to avoid some accountability, as the government, in this Legislature.

I have to tell you, on night sittings, as someone who arrived in this Legislature for the first time in October 2003, whose background as an elected official was at the municipal level, having served two terms—a total of six complete years—in the riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, I often like to describe what you do at the municipal level as attempting to succinctly, as quickly as you can, summarize an issue and make your case. If you don't, the chair of that particular committee in which you are discussing an issue will quickly call you to order and ask that you very much do that thing.

Much to my surprise, as someone who did not often follow the legislative proceedings on the legislative channel—and maybe there's a message there for all of us—when I arrived here in October 2003, like many of our first-time MPPs—and this was often a point of discussion; there were about 38 of us in 2003 who were here for the first time—what we experienced and found during night sittings, I'm not sure I have the language to describe. I will try to be as flattering as I possibly can and describe it as unproductive, theatrical, an opportunity for some people to speak perhaps in a manner that they might not otherwise speak in, should there have been a bit more focus on what was actually happening there—and perhaps some people sitting in the press gallery—while those goings-on were occurring.

I can tell you, as someone who's been here now going on five years, if night sittings are something that does not remain a part of the legislative system here in the province of Ontario, I, for one, will not miss them, because clearly, historically, they're an unproductive use of time, as I think most members view it.

Having said that, if we want to sit here till 9:30 at night or till midnight, as we did often in our first session, I'm happy to do that too, but not if it's going to remain as unproductive as it was, because clearly there are some things that need reforming here. Perhaps, if we're going to get a bit broader in our scope, it might be to empower the Speaker to have an ability to move members, from time to time, towards the topic at hand and try and keep them on topic.

The other thing I'll quickly mention is this issue that is occasionally being raised by some members of the two opposition parties, that we are somehow trying to avoid some sense of accountability to the voting public and to the members of the opposition party by putting these reforms forward. I want to remind some folks who may be watching this afternoon on television of some of the things that we did in the first four years of our mandate, which I think speak directly in contradiction to that argument.

It was a great surprise to me when I came to this place and found out that school boards, universities, colleges and hospitals—that the Provincial Auditor did not have the authority to go into those places and do value-for-money audits. He did not have the ability to go in and find out how the government was spending its money. Hospitals receive about $11 billion or $13 billion, $14 billion—I don't even know what the number is now—of transfers from the province of Ontario. Until we brought in legislation, the auditor did not have an ability to go in. School boards, universities, colleges, hospitals—the total? I'm not sure what they received: $15 billion, $20 billion, $25 billion, and we couldn't go out there and find out how that money was being spent so that we could report back to the people in the province of Ontario. It's incredible, quite frankly, when you think about it.

We had to extend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act to provincial hydro companies. For whatever reason, those two pieces of legislation did not extend to provincial hydro companies until we legislated it so.

Far from trying to avoid accountability and transparency, I would suggest that those two examples, and there are many more, clearly speak to what we try to do in here to make sure the people in the province of Ontario know exactly how their money is being spent. We hear sometimes, when the sunshine list comes out, members opposite calling us and complaining and saying, "What are you going to do about the $100,000 club?" Well, in fact, they wouldn't even have been able to know those numbers if our government had not passed legislation making this government more accountable for that type of information.

I have less than a minute to go, and I want to close by saying one thing. I saw a great example today of what needs to be reformed in this Legislature, beyond what we're doing here today. Our Minister of Aboriginal Affairs rose today and provided an answer to a question from the member of the official opposition party. And what did that breed? Somebody from the third party quickly jumping up in their chair, saying that our minister had mocked the person who asked the question, when in my opinion it was that individual member who

not only was mocking our minister in his question, but was mocking the entire Legislative Assembly here and people who are watching on television, to try and make an issue out of that minister's response.

I would say that that's a bigger part of the problem about what's going on here in this Legislature than anything we're trying to do through this motion.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to rise for a few minutes and debate the amendment to the change in the standing orders motion that the government House leader is jamming through this place in three days, substantial changes to not only the hours in this chamber but when things like private members' business will be conducted and when question period will be conducted.

1610

The honourable member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan talked about a horrible exchange today. The worst thing I've heard in 17 and a half years, and not a word of a lie, is the Premier last week implying that if you're not sitting in this chamber at 9 o'clock in the morning, you're somehow not working. That was horrible and an insult to every member, and the government members should be as insulted as I was. I talked privately to a number of members who thought that was just horrible. Maybe the Premier didn't mean to do it, but that's certainly the way it came across. I reread the Hansard and it was mean-spirited. I know that only this Sunday did I get home in the last three weeks. I've been working the whole time—then here quite a bit of that time. I had to actually cancel constituency appointments and a business awards thing on the weekend because I was travelling on business. I admit it was for political purposes on the weekend, but it's still part of the job of representing your party and working.

This process started, as I recall, with my colleague the honourable member from Nepean–Carleton talking about, before the election and since the election, the need to make this place more family-friendly. I do agree with what some of the honourable members on the other side have just said, that debates that go on until 9:30 at night or midnight often are fairly unproductive, and tempers do flare. Our constituents actually don't want us sitting here at night. My constituents prefer that I be at home. They're not really too sure what we're doing here all the time. They always ask, "When are you coming home? When are you coming to my birthday party? When are you coming to my mother's wedding anniversary?" or whatever, and we all try to do that.

I don't mind, I don't mind and there's no one on this side of the House saying, "We don't want to work at 9 o'clock in the morning." Of course we do. We're here anyway. We might as well be in the chamber. This is our place to hold the government accountable. But some of the changes are just so cynical as to be unbelievable. To move question period to 10:45 to 11:45—I'll read a letter from the press gallery president that arrived today—that means that if you're a broadcast reporter, the most important part of question period is that hour we spend here.

I always remind school groups that Parliament is a substitute for war. In other countries, like Afghanistan, they shoot each other first and then have the debate. The reason the mace looks like a club is that it's a war club. The reason the distance between the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition is exactly the distance of two men with outstretched swords across the aisle is because this is a substitute for war. We cannot be charged with an offence in this place while we are in this chamber. We cannot be charged with slander. We have freedom. Our prayer reflects every day that we're going to cherish freedom and justice. Here we settle our debates and we should leave as friends. In fact, when I started 18 years ago, we used to leave as friends. It was very common to have a euchre game with members of the government side or the opposition party. It was very common to have a beer or a coffee after work—maybe too many sometimes. But we were friends, and part of making this place better is to get the camaraderie back. It's not going to happen when you move question period to 10:45 to 11:45.

The media can't do their scrum, be on the noon news and be filing for their noon news in those 15 minutes from 11:45 to noon, because we're also doing introduction of visitors at that time, in case you didn't notice; that got slipped in. So we may go right past noon. Any bad news that happened in question period—and this is our one hour that Her Majesty's official loyal opposition gets to hold the government accountable for things that might have happened in the previous 24-hour news cycle. You are changing the news cycle. So anything we told you that might come up as newsworthy probably won't make the noon news most days. And it's not just my theory; it's exactly what the unanimous vote of the press gallery is saying in a letter today, and I'll read it. But also you've got all afternoon, then, because then we'll come back in the middle of the afternoon, at 1:30 one day and 3 o'clock on the next day or whatever, a couple of days a week, and then we come back for routine proceedings. The government then, for the 6 o'clock news, gets to do the good-news stuff all afternoon. Today is Earth Day, so Minister Gerretsen did an Earth Day; that's your 6 o'clock news. Anything bad that happened in the morning during question period, you've got all afternoon to patch up before the 6 o'clock and 11 o'clock news. By 11 o'clock, whatever happened at 11 o'clock in the morning in question period is stale. So what you're doing is effectively taking any bad news off the air; that's exactly what you're doing. Some other cynical parties have done that. You're trying to say that because we're objecting to—and we're only objecting to the fact that it's going to be very difficult to keep the government accountable because of the timing of question period.

What was wrong with 1:30 in the afternoon? Your news in the morning reflected whatever happened the night before, as did your noon news. Then a new news cycle starts after noon for the 6 o'clock news and the 11 o'clock news. The people of Ontario pay big taxes, huge taxes in this province—in fact, we're the highest-taxed

jurisdiction in many classes in North America—and they deserve to know what their politicians are doing, and they deserve to know that the opposition is holding the government accountable.

This place is very important. There are dozens of dialysis clinics now open in this province because I got to bring in a motion when the NDP were in in the early 1990s, which passed in this House, to open up dialysis clinics. Before we opened them up in my area, you had to drive through the snow. Many, many people died; forget about the aboriginal people in the north. You could only go to Wellesley Hospital or Toronto hospital. I had a constituent come to me who said that he was going to commit suicide. His wife phoned me and said, "Would you please come and see him?" because the snowdrifts were up over his garage. He was paying, at that time, a tremendous amount of money, $260 a week, to take a cab for the three days a week that he had to come down to Toronto. Anyway, this place is important.

Today, Mr. Sterling—I should refer to him by his riding name; I'm sure you're going to correct me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Lanark.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Lanark. He made a very good point about an adoption bill, that there needs to be a clause put in to protect children who might have been raped through incest or criminal activity within their family—to prevent people, after they're adopted out, from getting their new names under adoption disclosure, so that there can't be reprisals there. That was a very good use of question period.

The Banting homestead: We had the largest rally from a single riding down here just a few months ago. No, sorry—the birthing unit in Alliston. We had busloads come down, thanks to Gibson's, which provided the buses. They came down, we had a rally, and we're making progress. This week—just yesterday—the birthing unit opened. We got an obstetrician who had been trained in Toronto but who had spent the last few years in New Zealand. She came back because she's got elderly parents just inside my riding. She's come back and the Alliston hospital opened.

When I first raised that in a meeting when we had the hospital board down, Mr. Smitherman's representative in the meeting said that they weren't going to do anything about it. He cited two other towns that had lost their local hospital birthing units, and he said that they got over it. Well, because we had the ability to hold the government accountable, to raise that issue and to bring people down, Mr. Smitherman, the health minister, came over to me right after that rally and said, "I've changed my mind. I'm going to help you," and he did. A supervisor was appointed, and they did the right thing. But if I hadn't had the opportunity to hold him accountable in question period at a time when my media could get it out on the airwaves, when it actually has some impact on public opinion and on what government does—as you say, just look at countries that don't have this place, that don't have this opportunity.

When I was a government minister for eight years, I enjoyed question period. I thought it was a great challenge. It wasn't something I shied away from. I knew that I knew my stuff fairly well, and I knew I wanted to help the honourable members. I was health minister—you've got to have a real heart for that—and there were some horrible stories that I had to help with, and I would probably not have had as much motivation if it hadn't been for the thousands of people who watch this every day—in fact, we're just trying to get the numbers from broadcasting—and the repeats on Sunday.

Hello, Mum. I know you're watching every day—anyway, the ability to keep the government accountable.

So that you don't think that these are just my theories, let me just read the letter from Randy Rath, the press gallery president here at Queen's Park. He says:

"At the annual general meeting of the Queen's Park press gallery today, members voted unanimously to raise concerns about the government's proposed new legislative calendar.

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"Gallery members have grave misgivings the new schedule would limit access to cabinet ministers and the Premier by reporters in the following ways:

"(1) The fact that post-question-period scrums would take place shortly before noon would make it difficult, if not impossible, for broadcast reporters to attend while they are filing for noon newscasts or doing live hits at noon.

"This creates an unacceptable gap in access between broadcast and print reporters.

"(2) On cabinet and caucus days, reporters now have two opportunities to scrum ministers, in the morning and again in the afternoon following question period. The new schedule would cut this access in half.

"The gallery considers that any reduction in access would undermine the function of a free press at Queen's Park." That's pretty strong language.

"(3) Losing the access to ministers after question period in the afternoons makes it more difficult for reporters to get reaction to news stories breaking later in the day.

"We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with you."

This was sent to the Premier, the government House leader, our House leader and the leaders of the parties.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm compelled to interrupt the member—and I apologize for doing that—to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy concerning green economic investment. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

I return to the member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Thank you, because Lisa Freedman, one of our very able table officers, was reminding me I've been going off-camera, and I'd hate to do that.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Shame. You'll lower the ratings.

Mr. Jim Wilson: And there's so much of me. You'd wonder how you couldn't keep it.

Anyway, our proposal, the amendment we're debating here today, is: We'd love to work 9 to 6; fine. It just means that there are going to be a lot more hours. We don't have the assistants in opposition. I was just going through the phone book two hours ago. I have one executive assistant at Queen's Park, and two constituency assistants. So to get ready for question period that early in the morning is going to be very, very difficult. We don't have the researchers and we don't have the staff.

Let's just see what we're up against here. In aboriginal affairs there are 16 political assistants; ag and food and rural affairs, nine—and this isn't including the constituency assistants; Attorney General, 14; children and youth services, 12; citizenship and immigration, 10; community and social services, 13. It goes up to health and long-term care, and I know this figure is low, but in the bodies in the phone book there are 26 political assistants. I had five ministerial positions and the most I ever had was 14, and that was as the Minister of Health. I think that when I went to northern affairs I probably had four.

Talk about work. As a minister, I wasn't in here very much. I was here for question period, but I had a driver one time clocking 84 hours a week. He quit because he couldn't keep up. Ministers work hard. Everybody works hard, whether you're in here or not.

Let me see: Tourism has 10; the Premier's office has 72 political assistants. So that's a lot of people to help you read the Ontario newspapers in the morning and to go through your clippings and to see what the news was in the previous 12 hours.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Seventy-two.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Yes, and they used to criticize Mike Harris. It's well over twice what Mike Harris had, and that's just in the phone book. You know how you hide them. That's not including the parliamentary assistants either, who all have their assistants. You get a lot more help and you can get to question period.

You're also going to drive costs up around here, by the way. Some of the bureaucrats are talking about—in the deputy ministers' offices, they're going to have to come in at 4 in the morning. Is that family-friendly for these people? They are going to have to come in at 4 in the morning. We're going to have to move the clips up to get them earlier in the morning. We're going to be trying to think up questions when the newspapers aren't even out yet. It's not family-friendly, and don't pretend it is. It's absolutely crazy.

You've got the media against you now. Maybe "duped" is too strong a word, but you certainly didn't follow the process you said you were going to follow when my colleague from Nepean–Carleton and my NDP colleague from Hamilton Centre—I'm not sure who was there from the government side, but there was a committee to be set up to spend some time and truly make the place more family-friendly. That didn't mean to change question period from 2 o'clock in the afternoon to mid-morning.

The committee, we heard today from the member for Nepean–Carleton, didn't even meet, or met in a cursory way. The government didn't pay attention at all. We did hear from the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan a few minutes ago that this stuff is all going to be reviewed and this is just a pilot project. Nothing gets changed, folks. I'm sure the Minister of Transportation, Mr. Bradley, who's the dean of this House, would tell you that they don't get changed back too often. How can we trust you? The committee that you set up in good faith, or we thought in good faith, to recommend some changes to truly make it family-friendly and get rid of those night sittings—the process was never used. We can't trust you there.

I remember the days when Dalton McGuinty said—he actually had it in his platform at one time and maybe even again in the last election—that he was going to respect members more, that committees were going to be more fair, that you wouldn't have the tyranny of the majority all the time that we seem to have in this place, and certainly he was going to respect the role of the private members.

In the last four minutes I have, I want to go back and talk about private members. There will be no one here Thursday afternoon when you do three private members' ballot items. There will certainly be no media to cover it. You've moved it to the most irrelevant part of the week. You know that so many members from outside town have to get into their cars or on a train or a plane to get home for their Friday and Saturday constituency appointments, and you are just completely demeaning the role of the regular member by moving it to the back end of the week. There is not going to be anybody here to listen to you debate. Attendance on Thursday mornings is bad enough, but it's a free democracy, so you're free to come and go. But to make it such an irrelevant thing and then to have as part of your speaking notes all the time that you guys just blab out over there, "Oh, we're going to do three ballot items now." You're doing three ballot items, there's a shorter time for each ballot item, and no one will be here. It will be completely irrelevant. I think you would even have problems keeping ministers here if it weren't for the rules. You'd probably have problems getting ministers here on Thursday afternoon.

But, again, I'll just repeat: You guys have the staff. You can order the bureaucracy in at 4 or 3:30 in the morning to get your notes and briefings ready. You have all that power and authority, but you're not being fair in this process. These are not good changes. If it's 9 to 6 or 9 to 6:30 at night, that's fine with me—make it 8:30—but move question period to where it's fairer for us to hold the government accountable. We need those precious couple more hours in the day to meet up with the news cycle that's occurring. The reporters need time to file, they need time to cover, and they need time to scrutinize and hold the government accountable too.

Finally, I did get some stats. They don't seem to have too many stats up to date, but in 1991, 140,000 households watched this thing live every day, I guess—I'm not

supposed to quote—140,000. That's quite a few years ago, and I don't know if interest would have waned since then, but it might have.

Why don't we just take a step back on all this and get some of the people who have been around here a long time to try and truly make this place people-friendly? Allow the committee that you set up to actually have a couple of meetings. Let's not ram these things through in three days, because we'll be stuck with them for the next probably 20 years in this place, and it's just not fair. It's cynical politics. Fewer people will take any interest.

How are you going to get people down on a Thursday afternoon in the middle of rush hour? Because private members' is going to start at about 4 in the afternoon. You're not even going to get your interest group down here. No one is going to come to Toronto on a Thursday afternoon in the middle of rush hour. We're used to having groups, as I said. When I was doing the dialysis thing, we had dialysis patients down. You've just ruined the whole thing to do with private members' public business.

You should be ashamed of yourselves, and you should be paying a little more attention to what you're actually doing. You've been given the sacred trust of a majority government, and people don't want to be looking over your shoulder and wondering why you're being cynical or how you're being cynical. They expect you to be fair to everyone because we're here to represent the taxpayers. As I said, they pay huge taxes. They expect us to conduct ourselves in the tradition of a free, open and democratic process. While I understand that being in the government and having a majority, you have to wield your muscle sometimes to get some things done, this isn't right. This is trying to make sure that your bad news is over with in the morning, and then you've got all afternoon to do your ministerial statements and debate items which may be of good news, and usually are of good news, to the government.

With that, I thank people at home for listening, I thank the honourable members here for listening, and I would ask the government to reconsider what it's doing.

1630

Mr. Peter Kormos: This is an incredibly important discussion. It's an incredibly important decision that 106 members of this assembly are going to have to make when this matter goes to a vote. There is not going to be a second and third reading. This is a motion; there is one debate. There is no referral of the matter to committee for consideration through the lens of members of the public or commentators. It's one debate, and upon the completion of this debate, the motion will be voted upon.

Look, I've been here just about 20 years now, and I tell you, I have been blessed to have served here with some incredible members of this Legislative Assembly from all three political parties. I was so fortunate, so very fortunate, so incredibly lucky to be here in the years before 1990. I watched and listened. And again, very much unlike the way it operates now, I didn't wait for House duty to come in here, because when somebody like Bob Nixon or Ian Scott or David Reville or Andy Brandt or a young Bob Runciman was speaking here on any number of issues, I sat in this chamber, way up there in that corner where Billy Murdoch is now, and I listened.

I remember the time in this Legislature—oh, I remember heckles. There were some great hecklers; there were some great verbal jousters. Dave Christopherson from the New Democrats was amongst those who—his heckles were at least loud. He thought they were clever, and most of the time, most people thought they were reasonably clever. And heck, go back again to that old guard—Scott, Nixon, Bradley; if a young neophyte was going to learn how to heckle here, they'd be well advised to sit at the feet of those great interjectors.

But I also remember a time in this chamber that when a party leader spoke in the leadoff, for instance, of an important policy debate, people of all three parties paused and listened. Again, the times have certainly changed. That change began most dramatically first in 1992. I remember that far too clearly. The second dramatic change to the standing orders was in 1997.

Let's make something perfectly clear: I believe that this has little to do with the family-friendly effort. Look, it's easy for me to say—I don't have a family, I don't have kids, and there are a few others here who don't have those obligations. It's easy for us to say—and I do—"Look, if you want to come here at 9, I'll come here at 8," to the chagrin of my caucus colleagues. Heck, I'll be here at 7, and I will indeed stay till 9 or 9:30.

So the extent of the point to which these standing orders accommodate people with families, I say, is as much an accident as anything else, because people's lives are incredibly different. It's incredibly different if you're a Toronto member as compared to a southwestern Ontario member or up Sarnia–Lambton way. It has nothing to do with getting home at night to take care of your kids or your spouse or parents or what have you, because you don't go home during the week—only very rarely. If you live in the far north, in remote regions, there are some weekends you don't get home just because Air Canada promises you that flight but the flight gets cancelled. So you turn around and go back to the exit ramp of whatever terminal the plane is leaving from and you go back to your Toronto apartment. You call your kids or your family or your constituents, and you've got to beg off and hope you can get a flight again the next day—maybe.

Even Toronto members—heck, do you think most Toronto members are going to go home in the evening to accommodate their spouses and kids and families? Probably not, because they're here in town. They'll be going to any number of events—like Mr. Hudak; and I wish we could during the week—church events, school events, PTA meetings, everything from the secular to the most spiritual.

So please, let's not frame this discussion in the context of family friendly. There will be any number of views about what constitutes family friendly. Let's acknowledge—and look, I gave the Premier credit.

Workdays? Where I come from, most workdays start at 6:30 or 7 o'clock in the morning, so please, let's not be overly self-indulgent, and a workday is a real workday. If you pour concrete or pour foundations, you're out there at 7 o'clock in the morning, in the cold, blizzardy winter. They'll use the heaters to heat the cement mix and they'll salt it to keep it fluid. And it doesn't matter whether you've been up late the night before with a sick kid or arguing with a spouse, or whether you had too much to drink and you're a little thick-headed that morning, you get up at 5:30, 6:30, 7 or 7:30 in the morning. You don't roll over in bed and say to your spouse, "Honey, call the constituency office or one of my constituency staff and tell them I won't be in for the 9:30 a.m. meeting. Tell them I'm really sorry, I'm meeting with the Premier or something like that." Most working people don't do that.

Look, we're very privileged. We are incredibly privileged. There are only 107 members or persons of this provincial community who at any given time get to sit in these seats. We've just gone through a number of inaugural speeches by newly elected members, and those I wasn't able to be here and listen to, I've read on Hansard. I've been touched and moved, as has every member of this place, I'm sure, by the stories that people elected to this chamber represent, not just for themselves but for their families, for their family histories and the stories that they tell for new Canadians. I watched as members gave their inaugural addresses, and I watched as they had their parents, spouses, aunts, uncles and kids, some of them from the old country, sitting up there in the members' gallery. Even as a relatively seasoned member of this chamber, I couldn't help but be moved by what the stories of their elected son, daughter, wife, husband, granddaughter, grandson meant.

We're very honoured to be here—very, very privileged. And I don't want to get into the debate about how much we earn, but we're paid reasonably well. I'm convinced as well that there isn't a single person—well, there may be one or two that I've witnessed in 20 years. But for those one or two, there isn't a single person who doesn't come here full of vim, vinegar and passion, thinking that they're going to do better than the guys who were running against them, or certainly wanting to. I don't deny anybody the right to say that about themselves here.

In 1992, there was an incredibly bitter debate in this chamber. The government of the day had a motion that dramatically changed the standing orders, radically changed the standing orders. I was reminded by Hansard of the opening comments on behalf of the Liberal opposition by Sean Conway. He may have been the opposition House leader at the time. Let me, if I may, remind people what Sean Conway had to say to the government of the day and to its House leader during the debate around that government's assault on the standing orders. He said:

"Let me be perhaps a bit indelicate"—very Conway-esque, "indelicate." "We have some members in this chamber who don't know the honourable member from Windsor–Riverside"—that was the government House leader who moved a motion with the radical changes to the standing orders.

1640

Conway said:

"We have some members of this chamber who don't know the honourable member for Windsor–Riverside as well as I do. I know him better than anyone in this place. I have been in the parliamentary trenches with the honourable member for Windsor–Riverside and I must say that it is a very particular and idiosyncratic pleasure to be with the government House leader in these matters.

"It is no secret that I relate to him like Stephen Lewis related to Morty Shulman. I don't like the member for Windsor–Riverside. In fact, on a number of occasions I can tell you that I have behaved badly because I dislike him so completely. I give him credit as a resourceful and hardworking fellow who has I think done very good bidding for his colleagues; I take nothing away from him on that account. But in my dealings with him I have often found him to be a man whose word is not worth the paper it is written on. I find him to be someone of a very disagreeable kind. I'll tell you, three years ago in a similar debate, I found his disagreeableness endless. I found that it verged on the despicable. I'm glad he's leaving,..." as the government House leader left the chamber.

I read that comment several times, knowing that I was going to be speaking here on behalf of the NDP caucus. I want to tell you that just as Sean Conway had served with the member for Windsor–Riverside, who was then the government House leader for many years, I've now had the opportunity to be here for a number of years with the government House leader and I want to be very, very clear: While Conway may have had his incredible, intense dislike for Dave Cooke, I have no dislike for Mr. Bryant. I found it a distinct honour to see him as a young MPP when he sat up here in the Liberal opposition, just sort of upwind from me, if you will, and I watched him, as a bright, young lawyer newly elected, work very hard at being an effective opposition member, and he became one. Do you remember that, Speaker? Bright, capable, hard-hitting, tough in question period. By God, did the government House leader, when he was an opposition member, ever court the media out there after that one-hour question period. He did. He did the stroll, as we call it. I don't want to be indelicate myself, but we call it the stroll. After question period, you have any number of government and opposition backbenchers strolling back and forth, looking for a reporter, saying, "Pick me, pick me," to interview them. The government House leader back in those days—and I remember him. We were both opposition members and we were opposition colleagues. We served on the same committees because of course he was the justice critic and, again, a newly elected member. I took great delight in getting to know him, working with him and watching him because it's a remarkable transition.

Yes, people know I'm a lawyer too. When I was elected here back in 1988, I came from a courtroom

culture. I was in court literally every day. I did criminal defence work literally five days a week, and as many as probably 50 weeks a year; our courts were shut down at Christmastime. But in the courtroom there are some economies expected by heavy-handed judges who will, in their most generous moments, look at their watches as you're speaking as defence counsel or as Crown Attorney, or as often as not simply interrupt and say, "Are you finished yet? I think I've heard quite enough."

I have to tell you that the transition from that courtroom environment, that courtroom culture, where there was an economy expected in terms of the words that you used—not the types of words but the volume of words you used—to coming here was a far different story. It was. Dave Reville or any one of those guys would take me down to the justice committee and say, "Kormos, we can't let them get past section 16 before 6 o'clock"—do you remember having to do that at times, Mr. Bradley, in opposition?—"because, you see, we've got a group that's going to come here tomorrow and comment on section 17 of the bill that's in committee now and we don't want that section passed by the government until we get these folks here to comment on it because we think we might be able to influence the government about section 17, a section of the bill that we have great concern about. So, Kormos, get into that committee and make sure the committee doesn't progress past section 16."

I was as adept as anyone could be at talking about the exegetical "or" versus the conjunctive "or" and whether this comma was appropriate as compared to a semicolon; taking the exchanges into the most obscure with, admittedly, the goal—and I used section 16 as an example; it could have been section 85 or 100—of slowing down the progress of that bill in committee because there was a constituency out there that had something important to say about it that couldn't be in Toronto until tomorrow, and we didn't want the next section passed until they got there.

Let me make this observation as well, please. I've witnessed the massive sweep of the election of 1987. I witnessed the massive sweep of the elections of 1990, 1995 and then 2003. In those sweeps, people inevitably get elected who have never been in Parliament before, and because it's a sweep, they are more likely than not to be elected as government members. In the course of those governments—I'll say this to you because I've said it so many times; I've said it publicly and I have no regrets about saying it. It's an accurate, in my view, observation. In the course of electoral sweeps, inevitably, some people get elected who have no business being in the Parliament, and in the course of electoral sweeps, inevitably, some good parliamentarians get defeated as victims of a sweep.

But I'll tell you this: One of the regrettable things about being elected in a sweep—and I'll not speak for others, so I'll perhaps speak for people within the NDP so that nobody takes great offence—is that they come to this Parliament with no experience in opposition. I remember in 2003 some very bright, capable people coming to the Parliament. I knew their reputations. I spoke with them. I remember how dismayed they would be at the fact that a debate was going on for three days—not three solid days; three sessional days of, on a good day, two and a half hours each.

I remember people would be looking up here at the opposition with disgust: "What are you guys doing?" They would literally ask, what are we doing here? Of course, we would respond, "Well, if you don't know, then what are you doing here?" But they said, "What are you guys doing?" You see, these are people who have never been in opposition. I have been in opposition a lot. Even when I was in government, I was in opposition. I acknowledge that, and I have no shame. I have no shame about that, because I think I will mention to you that in 1992, when that government introduced and forced through rule changes, I stood up and condemned them. I've got to tell you that I didn't like doing that. I took no delight in doing it. It wasn't a pleasant thing to do. But I stood up and condemned them.

The sad thing is and the sad observation is, as has already been noted, that first of all, governments don't introduce standing order changes to assist the opposition. It's just naive and silly to think that that's their goal. Least of all do majority governments—they didn't in 1992. They didn't in 1999. My friends, they are not doing it now, in 2008. These standing orders—some of which still remain enigmatic, because it was oh so difficult during some hurried meetings on Thursday mornings when House leaders met. It was so frustratingly difficult—nigh impossible—to get the government House leader to explain why a particular standing order was being amended. But this we know: Governments don't change standing orders to assist the opposition. Governments change standing orders to assist the government, and assisting the government inevitably means frustrating the opposition.

1650

Who was the member who, in the debate about the 1997 rule changes, said about the motion imposing the standing order changes at that time, the Baird standing orders: "The House and the people of Ontario should know what this motion is all about. It's all about making the trains run on time in Ontario. It's all about efficiency for the members of the Premier's staff, who are dissatisfied that they are unable to ram through legislation and other matters in this House in a period of time that they consider to be convenient to themselves"? Who said that? The member from St. Catharines, an experienced, long-time member of this House—indeed, one of its deans.

He also said this: "The government House leader says that previous governments have made changes. One thing members of this Legislature must know is that no future government will change the rules you implement; they won't, because it's convenient to governments. When you make this change, when you implement these changes to procedures, no future government will change

those to make it easier for the opposition. That's why it's so important to defeat, to eliminate these changes today, because governments like the convenience."

I remember being here in this chamber when the member from St. Catharines said those words. I listened to them with the respect and admiration that I've had for him ever since I've known him, and that I continue to have for him.

He said as well, "The full purpose of this change this afternoon is to make it more convenient for the advisers, the unelected whiz kids, the people who have little regard for those of us who are elected, to get their way, and to get their way more quickly. It has nothing to do with anything else and people in this province should know that."

I recall being here and listening with respect and admiration to the member for St. Catharines, who I have respected and admired from my first acquaintance with him, indeed, until the present.

"This is originating in the Office of the Premier. That's where this comes from. That crew is not interested in this House. That crew is not interested in democracy. They don't want the careful analysis of legislation that all of us look forward to in this House. They're not interested in anything that would slow down the implementation of their radical, revolutionary agenda, which is designed largely to benefit the richest, the most powerful and indeed the most privileged people in this province. They don't want that agenda slowed down in any way"—the member from St. Catharines again, during that same debate.

"Let's not pretend under some category that this has anything to do with enhancing the role of individual members. It has nothing to do with that. It has everything to do with using the sledgehammer on the opposition and bulldozing legislation and other matters through this House."

As I spoke to you a few minutes ago about the amazement of newly elected government members as to why the opposition would want to debate a bill for more than one day, first of all, there's the incredible tendency on the part of government members to say, "Well, we just don't understand. We heard them the other night"—here during debate the other afternoon, saying that she looked forward to unanimous support for that government bill. I said, "But why? Why is it in and of itself a good thing to have unanimous support?" There are various interests here in this province, and there will inevitably be people who don't agree with the policy position being advocated or being contained in a particular piece of legislation. Who speaks for them? More often than not, it's the opposition. And I say, just as more often than not it's the opposition that speaks for the minority, as often as not, it's the opposition that speaks for the majority too.

There's a sense that somehow legislation, once it's developed in the back room, should be sped through this chamber so that it can become law and public policy can be enacted. I say, on the contrary. There's a reason why parliamentary tradition has embraced first, second and third reading. It's so that you can't pass things in a New York minute with the snap of a finger. It's so that there has to be some sober consideration. It's so that there has to be an opportunity for the public to become aware of what's happening in their Parliament, be it here in Toronto or on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The tool that they use is either the television broadcasts from here, or the noon news, the 6 o'clock news, the 11 o'clock news and the morning newspapers. That press gallery, that collection of women and men peering over your shoulder, Speaker, are in my view one of the most important, one of the most significant and one of the most potent players in a democracy, because they are truly the eyes and ears of the public. Quite frankly, I think people appreciate the diversity of the press gallery, because inevitably, when they read about a piece of legislation in the Sun, they may get a very different perspective when they read about that same piece of legislation in the Toronto Star, in the Globe and Mail, in the National Post or in Now magazine. And that's a good thing, too.

I say it's our responsibility to make sure that we don't build a system that so disarms the opposition that they can't strategically moderate the flow of legislation through this chamber. Why, indeed, it has been commented on before in this chamber. Let me read this Hansard extract for you, Speaker: "What is important is that debate take place over a period of time, so that the public at home watching this television channel or through the news media coverage of this place, or for those who are lucky enough now to have the Internet and a computer to get Hansard, because they can't get Hansard any more in the printed form through the kind of subscription they used to—it's important that those people know what the issues are before the House, that they know the arguments on all sides." Again, the member for St. Catharines said that in 1997. He said that as an experienced legislator, as a conscientious and responsible legislator, as a parliamentarian who, like more than a few others here, cherishes the important responsibilities, respects those responsibilities and understands the obligations by virtue of being elected here.

I say to you, Speaker, that it is a fundamental error for there to be that fascination, that obsession, with speeding legislation—indeed, on those occasions where this House has had to respond speedily to issues, it has. It has, it has, it has. Indeed, this was said as well in the Legislature: "I think one has to understand that the only way opposition—not just opposition members but any public opposition to any proposed piece of legislation—can be effectively dealt with or talked about under our system of government, under the parliamentary system of government, is through the opposition parties' ability to debate, and yes, on occasion even stall or slow down progress of a particular bill, and that has worked very effectively over the years against governments of all political stripes." Ernie Eves said that in 1992, and Mr. Bradley, the member from St. Catharines, quoted him with ap-

proval in 1997. Mr. Bradley, the member for St. Catharines, said, "I agree with Ernie. He was right on that occasion and he made that argument with a good deal of sincerity and a knowledge of how this House works."

Most people here know Professor Graham White. Graham White is one of Canada's foremost authorities on parliamentary tradition and, more importantly, on the democratic workings of Parliament. I suspect most members have in their office libraries his book, The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis. If they don't, they should, and if they don't want to have it in their office library, of course it's in the legislative library. Hopefully it's still available on amazon.ca. Professor White would be pleased, I'm sure, were people to continue to buy the book in its latest edition.

1700

Professor White worked here at the Clerks' table. He's familiar with this provincial Legislature. I'm looking at page 96 of his book now. He said, "In terms of members' attendance, media attention and overall political import, question period is arguably the most significant proceeding of the Ontario Legislature."

I believe that. It is the highlight of the parliamentary day, because notwithstanding all of the showmanship, bravado and excessive rhetoric that's employed in question period, it is the one opportunity that Ontarians, through their elected members, have to attempt to hold their government to account. I've always believed that that's the most fundamental role of the opposition parties.

I hope I'm not being tedious by pointing out the carvings on the walls here. The pages, I'm sure, already know this from their introductory sessions. But facing the government up there is an eagle. It's facing the government because it's symbolically encouraging the government members to be—

Interjection: It's an owl.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's right, the owl—to use wisdom. Facing the opposition members is an eagle. The eagle, of course, is sharp-eyed and sometimes aggressive, but it's symbolically calling upon opposition members to be sharp-eyed and aggressive, and yes, even forceful. The eagle can be up there flying and spot a prey down there that's just like a little speck of dust to the human eye, but it can swoop down and grab it. The wisdom of the owl faces the government; the tenacity and sharp-sightedness, and I suppose courage, of the eagle faces the opposition.

I've always believed that the opposition has a very important role to play, and I think that good government is as much a function of good opposition as anything else. But if the opposition has the responsibility to keep the government in check, I say that the government backbenchers have their own responsibility, and that's to keep their cabinet in check.

Their cabinet can't do anything, their Premier can't do anything, unless she or he or it has the support of government backbenchers. That's a very difficult thing to do, to call one's own government to task, because it means you don't get to be a parliamentary assistant with the extra pay and the extra staff. You don't get the other perk jobs with the extra pay. You don't get picked for the junkets, which are part of the mechanisms that whips use to reward good and obedient members. Indeed, you're not inclined to be sitting in the front row—although it does happen from time to time, doesn't it, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. McGuinty, the Premier, back in 2003 promised parliamentary reform. Is this his idea of parliamentary reform? He promised more of a role for the backbencher. He promised to treat all members of this Legislature with respect and regard, including opposition members. Instead, we witness, day after day, a growing impatience with the opposition as if somehow they don't deserve their elected roles as much as government members do. I say to government members, the tides will shift. Don't brag to me about being elected in two successive Liberal sweeps. Come back here and get re-elected when there's a tide going against the Liberals. Brag to me then.

It's easy sitting as a government backbencher if you consider your only role to be to follow the marching orders. Then I suppose you simply wait for your turn at the cabinet door. But I say, notwithstanding the party system and party discipline, government members have as important a role here as they wish to seize for themselves. And I concede it's not easy.

We've already heard today about the position taken. Look, opposition members made it very clear at House leaders' meetings that while we didn't like some of the various standing order changes—I'm telling you, we didn't like I think it's going to be the super Monday now or the super Tuesday, the six and a half hours of debate on a single day. Super Monday. We didn't like that because it was conceivable that a bill could pass second reading in that one day. In fact, the government concedes that's the case. That's why they've altered their standing order proposal to include the provision that a bill can't be called for the same reading in both the morning and afternoon of the same day. So it was true.

When the Premier talks about more debate time, let's understand that that doesn't mean more debate time, because a bill will be deemed time-allocatable after 6.5 hours of debate. In fact, the Speaker will automatically adjourn debate at the point of 6.5 unless requested not to by the government. So there isn't more debate on any given bill—far from it.

In fact, you're sitting there every day, watching and listening, and I've noticed a tendency for government members not to engage in debate around government business. I've witnessed a tendency for government members to think that somehow making the two minutes of questions and comments between other speakers constitutes engaging in debate, or using five minutes of a 20-minute slot.

Why is it important for people to participate in that debate, even government members? Because your constituents and mine have a right to know where we stand on any given issue. Your constituents and mine have a right to have their stories told in this Parliament. Your constituents and mine have a right to have their lives talked about in the context of government legislation and

government policy initiatives. Your folks and mine have a right to a voice that they can hear when they tune in to the legislative channel or when they sit down and watch the 6 o'clock news or read tomorrow morning's Toronto Star.

Opposition House leaders have made it very clear that we understand the government's ability to change the standing orders. We've made it clear that we don't like the 6.5-hour super Monday. We've made it very clear that we think the quality of debate will be very poor at 9 or 9:30 a.m. We've made it very clear that we think that the three-hour private members' public business on Thursday afternoon has some frailties, that private members' public business loses some of its significance when you pop it into a Thursday afternoon, when attendance here is pretty sparse.

I'm going to tell you this: There will not be quorum calls, at least I hope to goodness there won't be. We'd be cutting our own throats to do a quorum call during private members' public business. But it'll be a heck of a time keeping a quorum, won't it? You're going to have to be making some pretty persuasive arguments to your colleagues when you want them to be here to support one of your bills on a Thursday afternoon. That's just the nature of the beast.

Do I like it that way? I'm here Thursdays. But then again, I don't have to drive all the way to Ottawa to get home. I don't have to drive all the way to Windsor. The members from Windsor drive four and a half hours to get to Windsor; I drive three and a half to get to Welland, which is a fraction of the distance but it's the QEW rush hour.

1710

But opposition members have made it clear that the important issue for us is question period. You know why? Because I believe, in no small part, that question period is the property of the opposition. We know that the government is the one that calls bills. In fact, a private member's public business bill is no longer a private member's bill once it has been discharged from committee. It then becomes a government bill because only the government can call it.

In fact, Speakers have had to rule on that, haven't they, Speaker? Remember that? We had a point of order when the government wanted to move private members' public business into an evening session. We argued that you could only call private members' public business during private members' public business hour on Thursday morning. Your ruling was that no, this is a government bill. Government House leaders for years have said, "How do we get this legislation passed?" There's the whining tone: "How do we get it passed?" You call it; that is how you get it passed.

There are only so many opposition members. That's why we're in opposition. New Democrats delay a bill for an overly long period of time? There are only 10 of us. Do the math. After seven hours or so, debates are down to 10 minutes per slot.

I remember being elected here, when a lead could be an hour and a half, two hours, three hours, four hours—and some were. I remember being here when petitions could last all day. I remember being here when bells could be rung. The tactic was to challenge the Chair and force a vote, and then the three whips would not show up to call the vote, and the bells would ring until they did.

Want to know something? Talk to some of the old-timers, if you will—the ones who were here before 1990. More legislation got passed. More legislation was considered by committee. The debate was more meaningful. More government members participated in the debate in a meaningful way. There was the prioritization of issues so that the public could truly be involved in an active way in developing policy around fundamental issues that affected them, their lives and their futures.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: What happened?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Sean Conway made changes.

Mr. Peter Kormos: We witnessed some modest changes in 1989, some very dramatic changes in 1992 and some even more drastic ones in 1997. Here we are in 2008, and has nobody here learned? As I say, at some point those Liberal colleagues of mine, the ones who are re-elected, will be sitting in opposition again. The ones who are defeated won't be here at all, but that's why the Liberals will be the opposition. I'm not saying it's going to happen in the next election. There are some who suspected it might have happened in the last election, but Lord knows, things didn't go the way they were planned, did they, Speaker? I've got to talk to that man someday, I've got to tell you; I've got some things to tell him. But someday, government members will be in opposition, the ones who are left, and just as I pleaded with NDP colleagues in 1992 and told them the same thing, I plead with members now to please use caution.

Opposition House leaders have made it very clear to the government that we'll sign off on all of the proposed rule changes, we will buy in, but question period is so fundamentally important. Question period deserves to be highlighted. Question period deserves to be positioned during the time in the day when it's most accessible for the public, either through their physical presence here or through the Legislative Assembly broadcast, and, most importantly, most fundamentally, by the media.

You know that earlier today a letter was sent by the president of the Queen's Park press gallery. That's part of this institution. Understand that. It's not just a gaggle of freelance reporters who wander in and out when they have to make a couple of bucks and write a story. Well, it's not. It's a very important part of this place, as the language is wont to call it. They are the eyes and ears of the public. If it's the opposition's job to keep the government honest, it's the media's job to keep all of us on the straight and narrow, isn't it? I've been here, once again, long enough to have known a whole lot of them, through a number of periods in time—periods in time when the culture here was different in oh, so many ways from what it is now.

I've got to tell you—and I had occasion to say this a couple of months ago when we were bidding farewell to two of our media colleagues here, two of the members of the press gallery. I wanted to thank them for the valuable input they had in helping me become adapted to Queen's Park and become more effective to the extent that I am at getting a message out there to folks, like the folks down where I come from, and folks in other parts of the province. I am extremely grateful to the members of the press gallery, all of whom I've known here to a pretty significant degree.

I tell you, I find their input on this issue to be a valuable bit of input. Mr. Rath, on behalf of the press gallery, exhorts this government to not move question period to 10:45 a.m. Mr. Rath says:

"The fact that post-question-period scrums would take place shortly before noon would make it difficult, if not impossible, for broadcast reporters to attend while they are filing for noon newscasts or doing live hits at noon....

"On cabinet and caucus days, reporters now have two opportunities to scrum ministers, in the morning and again in the afternoon following question period. The new schedule would cut this access in half."

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The member for Manitoulin interjects. He obviously disagrees with the press gallery. They're all wrong. Old Jimmy Coyle, who's been a newspaper reporter for a couple of decades at least—not a couple, a few—has seen them come and go at Queen's Park. He's seen them rise and fall. Of course, he must be wrong. Randy Rath, the president of the press gallery, underwent some pretty vicious mocking earlier today during question period. Randy Rath underwent some pretty serious mocking—vicious mocking, I would call it.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The member interjects. It wasn't very funny, friend, to see a serious position taken by the Queen's Park press gallery—this isn't a gaggle of freelance reporters who wander in or out whenever they need a few bucks by writing a story or a column. These are long-time, serious, professional journalists, yet they are, according to this government, all wet, and wrong on every issue.

Government members and the Premier may want to know that Professor Graham White, in addition to authoring the book that I referred to and his lengthy analysis of question period and its importance to Parliament, wrote, on April 22, 2008, to Howard Hampton, leader of the NDP. In this letter he writes:

"As mentioned above, while there is room to debate many of the proposed rule changes, I cannot imagine that any neutral observer could disagree that moving question period into the morning would very seriously detract from the strongest accountability mechanism available to the opposition....

"In short, a vibrant, effective question period is essential to the health of democracy in this province.

"Moving question period into the morning would severely undercut its effectiveness. I understand that the government's initial plan was to begin question period at 9 a.m. While the revised proposed starting time of 10:45 a.m. is somewhat better, it would still leave the opposition in a very difficult position. Effective questions require planning, research and reflection. This is difficult enough when question period occurs early in the afternoon but would be all but impossible for a morning question period ... whatever changes are made to the starting and ending time of the legislative day, there is absolutely no need whatsoever to change the time of question period."

1720

There are enough copies of this letter circulating around here now. I won't use the limited amount of time I have left to read the rest of it into the record. I want you to understand this, Speaker: Opposition House leaders agreed to sign off on this motion but for the question of question period. We think it's incredibly important.

We understand the government wants to spend more hours each day debating. It wants to accelerate the pace with which its legislation passes. As a majority government, they can do that. We don't like it; we understand it. We indeed have always found evening sittings regrettable not because it's in the evening but because it's a sessional day with no question period. That's been clear. You want to sit Fridays? Have a question period on Friday. The New Democrats have been very clear at any number of points in the history of this government that we will be prepared to sit on Fridays. Let's have question period and then orders of the day. You can call whatever bill you want. How do you pass legislation, my friends? You call the bills on the order paper. It's as simple as that.

I want to make it clear as well that I regret the loss of that period of time—Mr. Wilson talked about it earlier today. While there are strong and heated adversarial exchanges here, during that Peterson auto insurance debate I think I held the floor for darned near a month, week after week after week on the government's Bill 68. Then it culminated when the government figured they were going to wrap it up with that overnight session. Murray Elston was the minister in charge of auto insurance. I remember that Bob Runciman was the critic for the Conservatives.

That was a tough, long debate. There was huge public interest in it. The opposition did what it felt it had to do—I think it was rewarded for doing that in the election of 1990—to make sure public attention was focused on the debate and make sure the government understood how important this was to so many people. Yet there was still an incredibly high level of cordiality between members, including opposition members.

That's why I wanted to be very clear, when I opened my comments today, that while Mr. Conway may have despised David Cooke, the government House leader of that day, I do not share that same emotion with respect to Mr. Bryant. I understand that the government House leader is effectively doing what the Premier's office wants him to do.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I want you to understand this and I want government members to understand this. This has not been a hostile Parliament. It hasn't. This has not been a dilatory opposition.

A few years back, when Mr. Stockwell was the government House leader, I remember his one reference to me as the House leader from hell. My caucus mates promptly got me a T-shirt that said "The House Leader from Hell," and I wore it with some pride.

I remember when this place was hostile. I don't want it to return to that condition.

Let me remind folks once again what my old friend Mr. Bradley had to say in 1997. This was during the debate around the Conservative government, the Baird standing order changes: "We had a circumstance where I thought we were coming into the last couple of weeks of this portion of the sitting of the Legislature where the mood was good, where people were trying to be conciliatory; not all the t's were crossed and not all the i's were dotted, but we were trying to be conciliatory. I thought we could have accommodated the government agenda, because they had been wise enough, for instance, not to include Bill 136, a very controversial piece of legislation. I thought we could have accommodated the government agenda and I genuinely believed that. There was a mood of co-operation. When people asked for unanimous consent in this House, they would get unanimous consent.

"I can't emphasize how important unanimous consent is, because someday this government is going to make a mistake. It's going to lose a bill and it's going to ask the opposition if they can have unanimous consent to roll back the clock. Usually the opposition, although it has a strategic opportunity to thwart the government's agenda on that occasion, when it recognizes that it was simply a clerical error or an error of procedure, will grant the government that unanimous consent. Well, I'm going to tell you something: You implement this and you've seen the last unanimous consent."

So Mr. Bradley told John Baird in 1997, and it was a very unhappy place, I tell you, because Mr. Bradley, on behalf of his Liberal colleagues, indeed used every opportunity, however unfair, to retaliate.

Again, I'm not saying that New Democrats are going to put themselves in that position, but I'm telling you that all of us would far sooner serve in a chamber where we could retain some level of cordiality and where, from time to time, when a mistake was made, there would be an opportunity to cure that error.

We've seen it over and over again. We've seen the government House leader walk over to this side, saying, "X, Y or Z has happened. We didn't expect it. Will you give us UC?" That's the euphemism around here—UC—for some sort of remedy. "Of course."

I get the impression that government members see this as something of a joke, that they've been served poorly by the sources of their information. I don't credit Mr. Bryant with having authored this, because I'm confident it didn't come from him but it came from the Premier's office. And I'm equally confident that when it comes to the Premier's office, let's not kid ourselves, it serves the Premier's interests. Just as the Premier's interests aren't always the interests of the people of Ontario, they're not always the interests of his own backbenchers either because, if there's one single, most regrettable transition that's occurred here, it's the transfer of power from elected members to the Premier's office and, even more significantly, to the unelected people in the Premier's office, and even more significantly than that, to the unelected people who aren't even in the Premier's office, who are in any number of downtown law firms, corporate towers or consulting offices.

I'll be back on the Monday following the passage of these orders, ready to do question period, and so will nine other New Democrats. We'll debate bills for six and a half hours a day or longer, and so will, I'm sure, my Conservative counterparts. But I just say we are doing a very regrettable thing. It is truly unfortunate. My fear, my real apprehension, is that 10 years down the road, just as I have been able to quote members from the past who opposed similar rule changes, some of my Liberal colleagues here will be sitting as opposition members, reminding—

Hon. James J. Bradley: I don't have to speak now. You've put all my quotes in.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Bradley says—I appreciate your acknowledgement of those quotes, sir.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you. I'm really pleased you did that.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You're welcome, Mr. Bradley. "Thank you," then, goes into Hansard.

Regrettable. I'm not pleased, and I'm not particularly proud of this chamber right now, but we'll continue to do battle as we must.

1730

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'm pleased to be sharing my time with the member for Pickering–Scarborough East. On October 10, 2007, my life changed. I have to say that being elected has been one of the greatest experiences of my life; to be able to represent the people of Hamilton Mountain in this House. I'm extremely proud of the work we do, and I'm happy to speak on the issue of the proposed changes of the standing orders to the Ontario Legislature.

I'd like to first state that I will be supporting the changes in the hours of the Legislature. I agree with the members of the House, the one member who spoke last night, when she talked about what it was like to be a politician and the workload that comes with it. She stated, and I agree, that when you put your name on a ballot, you know that it's going to be a 24/7 job. When I decided to run for office, I spoke to some members of this House who are no longer here. They told me in no uncertain terms that this job was going to be extremely busy; that the pace is very hectic and ultimately, "It will be the best job of your life." As a new member to this

House, I can say that they were completely correct. I appreciate their candidness.

But as a single person with no dependants in this House, I have no doubt that for members who do have children and a family, there is a challenge. There's a challenge to spend time with their family. These proposed changes will make it easier to balance work and family life, encouraging more people to become active in politics so that they will not have to choose between work life and family life but they'll be able to enjoy both.

I'm looking forward to this change and being able to spend more time in my community. When the House starts at 1:30 and ends at 9, it's difficult to get back home to attend some important events. With this change, now I have the flexibility to attend some of those events when the House is sitting.

I believe that, with the opposition, we share the honour of representing the people of Ontario. The basis of our legislative workday has been around since 1893, but a lot has changed since then—penicillin, airplanes and now BlackBerries. Our lives have changed. I truly believe it's time that our Legislature change as well, to resemble the real lives of Ontarians.

What we're asking is to start the workday at 9 rather than 1:30 in this House. Our proposal would expand hours we sit per week by 35%. Our proposal would expand private members' opportunities by 50%. Our proposal will all but eliminate evening sittings. Our proposal makes sense.

It's also important to note that we have listened to the opposition. They proposed to move question period later, to 10:45 a.m., and to have a legislative committee review the calendar over the summer. Also, we removed the proposal to sit on Fridays. It is also important to note that this Legislature has seen many changes over the years. Working towards modernizing the Legislature is not something new. I think that these proposed changes will be beneficial.

As a new member who often has to sit late in this House—I think that that's part of being a new member; they give you extra House duty. But I have to say that I was really surprised when I was in the House a while back and I was listening to a debate about gummy bears. I have nothing against gummy bears, but as I sat back and listened to this debate, I wondered what my residents in my riding of Hamilton Mountain would think if they watched that debate. I had realized during that evening that everyone was tired and the quality of the debate was quickly declining. I'm optimistic that the proposed changes will encourage effective and meaningful debate in this House.

I would also like to read to this House some of the quotes that I've come across over the past little while about this issue. The Canadian Press reported on February 11 of this year that the member for Nepean–Carleton initially praised the government's proposed changes. She said, "I'm encouraged the government is thinking outside the box and looking at ways to make the Legislature more family-friendly."

My hometown paper, the Hamilton Spectator, writes on February 13: "Government House leader Michael Bryant is on the right track in his proposed modernization of how business is done at Queen's Park. It's the sort of approach that's needed to work toward remedying the gender imbalance at the provincial level of government....

"Bryant's proposed changes are a small but meaningful step in the right direction and could have a positive impact on the willingness of women to run for provincial office."

Mr. Speaker, I agree with that.

The Sudbury Star, on February 13, 2008, wrote: "Opposition reaction to the Ontario Liberals' attempt to reschedule legislative debate to daylight hours—including moving question period to 9:30 a.m. from 3 p.m.—has been unduly petulant....

"Opposition parties need to climb down off their high horse on this one. There will be little sympathy from the public.

"Give the new hours a chance."

On February 12, 2008, the Toronto Star wrote: "Unfortunately, while losing its collegiality, the Legislature has retained some of its macho vestiges, including the late-night sittings (minus the carousing). In other words, it has the worst of both worlds.

"To his credit, Michael Bryant, the government House leader, is trying to change that with a proposed set of rule changes that would eliminate late-night sittings (to make the Legislature more family-friendly) and, at the same time, expand the time for debating private members' bills by 50% (to enhance the role of backbenchers)."

On February 20, the Collingwood Enterprise-Bulletin wrote: "Most Ontarians don't have a problem with their MPPs and their employees getting up early in the morning, just like they do, to go to work."

In the Toronto Star on Saturday, April 19, 2008, a dart was given to the provincial opposition parties "for making a big deal out of the trivial; for the past few days, the Progressive Conservatives and New Democrats focused not on weighty matters such as the economy or the looming TTC strike but on the Liberal government's plans to move the daily question period from the afternoon to the morning. The move, which will accommodate the elimination of evening sittings of the Legislature (an opposition demand), was variously denounced as 'cynical' and 'undemocratic' by the PCs and NDP. Their real concern: It will give them less time to prepare for question period. The solution: get to work earlier."

1740

The last quote is from the Leader of the Opposition. He was crystal clear during the last election when he told voters of his support for family-friendly changes to the Legislature:

"You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock in the morning.... I think, if you had the sitting start in the morning and finish at suppertime, it allows moms and dads"—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the members of the House to refrain from heckling so that I can hear the member from Hamilton Mountain. The member for Hamilton Mountain has the floor.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: "You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock in the morning.... I think, if you had the sitting start in the morning and finish at suppertime, it allows moms and dads and young families to be home more often with their family and to have the thing just a bit more family-friendly. So I think it means you'd look more often to start in the morning and have your day proceed so that you could use those hours and finish by suppertime." He said that on August 29, 2007.

I would also like to make one last comment in regard to a comment by my friend in the opposition, where he said that there was a time in this House where opposition members as well as government members, after the House sat, would get together and play euchre, have a coffee and be friends.

As a new member, I have to say that I don't think that changing the hours is going to eliminate the friendliness between the opposition and the government. As a new member, I have found everyone to be extremely respectful, and if I knew how to play euchre, I would enjoy a game of euchre after the House.

In closing, I would just like to say that I agree with the proposed changes and look forward to seeing the changes in the House.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm very pleased to join in the debate following the member from Hamilton Mountain. As a brand new member of the Legislature—frankly, I haven't been here all that much longer than she has; one mandate only—to some extent we're both still somewhat new compared to a few of the members who are here today who have a much longer history.

I just want to reflect on a couple of things in the seven or eight minutes or so that I have. I want to reflect briefly on the first few weeks that I spent here in the late fall of 2003. We were a new government. I think all parties, all three sides of the House, were testing their mettle, so to speak, in their new or adjusted roles.

During that very limited time we went through daytime sittings, we did evening sittings, the bells rang incessantly for a period of time, and we did a sequence of midnight sittings. That was in the late fall, and I'd proceed to drive home from this place around midnight, a quarter after 12, because I live just on the east side of Toronto, right at the edge now, with my new riding being Pickering–Scarborough East. I'd get home at about 1 o'clock, 1:30 in the morning, and I'd go to bed.

At that time, I was working with the Minister of Government Services, then-Management Board Secretariat, and the minister had the desire to have early-morning meetings and briefings. So I'd arrive back here by about 7:30 in the morning in preparation for an 8 o'clock briefing or an 8 o'clock meeting.

After about two weeks of that, arriving home at 1:30 in the snow and ice and arriving back here at 7:30 in the morning, I said to my wife, "What have I done to my life?" A lot of the time around this place, I think we feel that way: What have we done to our lives?

I'm anxious to see some changes made. I'm anxious to see this new schedule that better reflects a more traditional business environment, if I can call it that, where we start the formal part of the business on a regular basis at 9 in the morning and we finish it up for the most part by 5:30 or 6 in the evening. It's more reflective in the context of what we do day by day here, and more reflective of what we might find in some other business environment along the way.

During the last mandate I was part of a select committee on democratic renewal. The principal mandate was to look locally, nationally and even internationally at electoral systems. That process was part of a government commitment to take a look, as we did during the election through a plebiscite, at alternate systems of putting people in this place.

Interestingly, during that process, as we did things in committee here and as we travelled—and those were members from all sides of the House—we consistently heard from a variety of people about the need to reform the way we do our business, or as we travelled and looked at other jurisdictions, we found that they did their business in a very different way. It became evident during that process that we needed to continue to look, explore and come to some conclusions on the way we function here. Whether it's the nature of the debate or whether in part it's the way we do business day to day, that's all part and parcel, I think, of what is transpiring.

Jurisdictions we looked at internationally, particularly in Germany and the UK, through Scotland and Ireland, tended more so to have a scheduling strategy that better reflected business hours. I can't recall off the top of my head who had 9 to 5, who had 9 to 6 and who met for how many days and which days committees were on, but I do recall a lot of discussion around, "We have a normal business day environment. We still have our political engagements and our constituent responsibilities, and weekends that go with that," but from the standpoint of getting the business done, it tended to better reflect 9 to 5 or 9 to 6, something more of that ilk. I think part of the ongoing discussion informed the process during that period as the electoral reforms looked at how we elect people, but I think it also informed the Legislature a little bit in the context of what other jurisdictions are doing.

I'll tell you that during that discussion, I had the opportunity to travel to Scotland, Ireland and Germany for a 10-day period. I heard, if not the exact words—I certainly heard the discussion. We talked to folks there. We talked particularly to women who were elected about the capacity to be able to manage family. We talked about, in essence, family-friendly; maybe not those exact words, but we talked about environments that were more business-conducive or more supportive of a family environment that gave people a greater opportunity to do things that we might normally want to do or have at least an opportunity to do, particularly as it relates to young families.

During this mandate, I have had the pleasure already of having been asked through government and/or caucus to engage in a couple of committees in addition to our normal role. Each of us finds ourselves on any number of committees and activities, whether it's our standing committee work or whether it's committees of the Legislative Assembly of one sort or another. I was just at a Board of Internal Economy meeting in which we were looking at estimates for various officers of the Legislature. I'm also sitting on a committee that deals with officers of the assembly. The reason I'm saying that is that we're trying to schedule meetings and we've agreed in one instance that 9 o'clock Monday morning works well. We can do some interviews during a Monday. We're going to fit the House schedule around that for those members. We're going to ask for some dispositions so they know we're each going to be missing someone out of the House much of the day, doing interviews.

The point I'm trying to make is that by having a schedule that allows for more businesslike hours, as you schedule those kinds of functions, it's much easier for members to be able to coordinate calendars around that. What I see happening when we try to schedule meetings is that as we're scheduling even weeks ahead, people are saying, "Well, I can't be there Monday morning. We don't have House duty and therefore I've scheduled a constituency activity on Monday morning." So you've already lost, in this instance, one member from each party or two or three members. Now you're constantly juggling, trying to find a schedule that works, and it keeps moving more and more distant into the future where committees can meet.

This type of scheduling would put people into a train of thought and a structure that would say, "Okay, from 9 till 6, Monday to Thursday, for the most part, that's when we're here," and we'll make the committees work within that context. I think it will be far more efficient for that supplementary role we play here, in addition to the debate role, the things that people don't see us doing as often, whether it's standing committees, select committees, subsets of committees or caucuses individually. People don't see that, but I think there will be a far more efficient means for us to be able to schedule those types of activities for all members of this House, on all sides of the House, and make it fit our schedules better and also create that more businesslike environment.

I'd like to note in the few seconds I have left that this legislative piece provides for a review. This is an opportunity, should this pass, for us to get up and running, but it also provides an opportunity during the summer for the legislative committee and then, subsequently, as we come into the fall, to review how it's gone and to be able to report back accordingly. It's not as though a decision now in this debate will necessarily be carved in stone. Certainly within this is a structure for formal review very soon as part of the process, as well as a review shortly after it starts: Is it working? Does it need an overhaul? Does it need tweaking? Or does it need to be abandoned?

I'm anxious to see the debate continue. I'm anxious to see us look at a new way of doing business here and the opportunity to review that if in effect this bill passes.

1750

Mr. Tim Hudak: In the time I have this evening, I want to note a few things. First of all, as has been said in the debate on this motion, this is, at least from my memory, the fourth consecutive government to bring forward significant rule changes. But I'm going to argue that this is the first to severely restrict the ability of members to hold the government accountable through the daily question period. Sadly, a second impact of these proposed changes is to send, what's very important to members of the opposition and members who are not in cabinet, private members' public business to the equivalent of the legislative gulag on Thursday afternoons, when I anticipate that not too many members will be here in the assembly.

My colleague from Welland outlined a number of things that had happened before. It was the Peterson government—Sean Conway—that brought forward rule changes in the late 1980s. I'm referring to an essay in the autumn Canadian Parliamentary Review by Adam McDonald, who was a former intern here in the Legislature and who had worked in the Liberal whip's office and had worked in my office, among others, as an intern. It gives an important history, an intelligent analysis, as you would expect Adam to do. He refers to May 1989, when "Peter Kormos, NDP member for Welland–Thorold at the time, rose on a point of personal privilege. He accused Premier Peterson of lying to the House, which is considered unparliamentary language. Mr. Kormos" at the time "refused to withdraw the word, and the Speaker named him."

Under the standing orders today, if a member is named, then he leaves the chamber. Under the standing orders in 1989, the Speaker's ruling could be challenged by individual members, and that's what Mr. Kormos and others did. Then, on May 29, 1989, the Speaker called members in to rule on the challenge to his ruling and to vote on it at 4:43 p.m.

"In those days, the whips of the parties used to walk into the chamber together to indicate that the members had assembled and were prepared to vote. In this case the opposition whip refused to appear and kept the bells ringing. At 6:32 on June 1"—again, this began on May 29—"the Speaker suspended the sitting and ordered that 'the bells are deemed to be ringing until the sitting is resumed at 9 a.m., Friday, 2 June 1989.' He repeated this order each day until Tuesday, June 6. The opposition's tactics had succeeded in disrupting the business of the House for an entire week."

Shortly thereafter, two days later, in fact, the government House leader at the time, Mr. Conway, brought forward rule changes, "saying that the government would get its business done and would do so without continuous obstruction from the opposition."

Mr. McDonald has an important quote here from Mr. Conway, but noting that the rule changes of the day were

to try—whatever your opinion was of the debate at the time—to strike a balance between the opposition's ability to hold the government accountable and to use tactics in the Legislature and the government's ability to get things done. So Mr. Conway brought in rule changes in 1989 for that purpose and made changes to allow debate from the opposition, but took away some stalling tactics.

Similarly, in 1990—Mr. McDonald in his essay calls it a turning point—Mike Harris, then-leader of the third party, had some very strong opposition. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Murdoch and others here—and the Speaker as well—in the assembly were part of that caucus at the time. This was around the time, I believe, of the NDP budget that was going to spend the province out of recession.

One of the tactics the member next to me, the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Mr. Sterling, brought forward was a series of points of order during question period, followed by the time that "Mike Harris stood up to introduce a bill, the title of which contained the name of every Ontario body of water. Mr. Harris started just before 4 p.m. that day and the length of the bill's title (in addition to interjections from frustrated MPPs and the repetition of the title by both the Speaker and the Clerk, as required by the standing orders) carried the House to the end of the sessional day."

The Conservative caucus at the time used these tactics to express their strong displeasure with the NDP budget and other bills. The NDP, just as the Liberals and Peterson had done before them, brought in substantial rule changes. Interestingly, then-MPP Jim Bradley, in the opposition Liberal caucus, made some very strong objections to the rule changes at the time. The NDP brought in some highly restrictive rule changes, again, in their view at the time, to try to have the balance between the government getting its business done and the ability of the opposition to express itself.

The Harris government brought in rule changes as well in its time. We remember—I think it was Bill 26, when I think the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, Alvin Curling, who became the Speaker as well, sat here famously in the Legislature in objection because there was no rule at the time against abstaining—

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke remarks about a horse.

He was allowed to abstain, and that held up hearings for a number of days.

You may remember as well, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP brought in some 12,000 amendments to the committee of the whole House with respect to the City of Toronto Act at the time—again, tactics where the opposition, in their view, wanted to obstruct the government's agenda; they had strong objections to the bills of the day. The government of the day, under Mike Harris, responded with rule changes, to again, in the opinion of the government of the day, make sure there was a right balance between allowing the government to get its bills passed that it is duly elected to do and the ability of the opposition to object and to have their say.

Whatever you thought about the Harris or Peterson or Rae rule changes, they all gathered around and concentrated on the length of time members spoke in the House and on delaying tactics.

What I'm arguing now is that for the first time we are seeing an attempt by the government of the day to restrict the ability of opposition members to hold them accountable in question period and a move to send private members' bills to a time that we will not see the kind of participation that we should for private members' bills. I think that's highly unfortunate.

What's doubly unfortunate is that they have dressed this up in the notion of family-friendly rule changes. Nothing can be farther from the truth. This is actually about limiting the ability of the opposition to hold the government accountable. I'm not sure, and correct me if I'm wrong—maybe the speakers on the government side opposite will tell me. The delaying tactics that the opposition, either the Conservatives or NDP, have been using in this Legislature: I don't think there have been any. I think you've had a responsible opposition. If we strongly object to a bill, we debate it; we carry it through. If we don't have strong objections or a compromise is reasonably achieved, then the bill is called to a vote or moved to committee. But I ask the members opposite to give me the equivalent of the lakes and rivers, the equivalent of Mr. Kormos's 17-and-a-half-hour filibuster against auto insurance, the equivalent of Alvin Curling's stay here in the Legislature, or the 12,000 amendments of the City of Toronto Act. I defy them to tell me about the obstruction tactics that the official opposition has used here in the Legislature.

In reality, this is about limiting our role to hold them accountable by moving question period to earlier in the day. If they were truly interested in family-friendly legislation, all they'd have to do is move orders of the day from the evening to the mornings and maintain question period at a predictable time. In fact, you can lock it in, as we have proposed, around 1 p.m. and move this delay that we see from various ministers' statements and introduction and such to another time of the day.

I want to congratulate my colleague from Nepean–Carleton, who has championed this issue of making Ontario a more family-friendly Legislature, particularly for young women who live outside of the city of Toronto—young mothers—to give a greater opportunity to participate here at Queen's Park and to attract more to run as MPPs in the first place. Sadly, in a shameful and, I'd say, cowardly way, the Premier and his House leader have used that as a screen to bring forward these proposals that limit the ability of the opposition to hold the government to account.

These proposals are an insult to those in the Legislature who have been working hard in a non-partisan approach to ensure that parents who don't represent Toronto and who have young kids can feel comfortable running for office. Sadly, this bill before the House will

do quite the opposite, dressed up in a family-friendly approach.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I note that it's 6 o'clock. I wish to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 37, the question that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

GREEN POWER GENERATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Energy. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or his parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I'm pleased to recognize the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

1800

Mr. Paul Miller: I won't be taking the full five minutes. This is a quick statement and question. Today, Minister Phillips, the Minister of Energy, made a statement: "We are the fastest-growing renewable jurisdiction in all of North America," as far as renewable green energy. I am not sure that that quote is correct. I have some statistics in front of me that would challenge that statement. For example, talking megawatts, California had a million megawatts of solar energy, Texas has 4,000 megawatts of wind power and there are several other jurisdictions in North America that are way ahead of the quote of the 501 megawatts for wind in Ontario. Even Alberta has surpassed us, with 523 megawatts.

All I'm saying is that if you're going to stand up in the House, hopefully you've got your numbers correct on energy. I would hope that if you're touting the line of the government on how wonderful they're doing, it would be good if you've got your numbers correct. I would just like the minister to provide us with the information that he assumed that the situation was better than it was.

We'd like a correction statement in the House, if possible, about these numbers. I'd be happy to share with the minister, if he'd like to follow up and look at them. If that correction could be done, I'd appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Niagara Falls to reply on behalf of the government.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to respond to my good friend's question, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. First, let me just say that our government has taken significant strides in developing renewable generation and cultivating green technology in Ontario. In wind power, we've moved from last place to one of the leading wind power jurisdictions in Canada. We now have four large, commercially operating wind farms, including Canada's largest in Sault Ste. Marie. New wind power, hydroelectric, biomass and solar operations are ensuring that Ontario meets its overall goal of ensuring that by 2025, Ontario will have 15,700 megawatts of installed renewable energy capacity, an overall doubling of the amount of renewable capacity in our grid.

We've also taken important steps through our renewable energy standard offer program that is making Ontario a leader in solar power in North America. That's clean power that will help to ease the strain on our electricity system, reduce air pollution and create new, high-skill jobs. We have, in fact, set a target of installing 100,000 residential solar systems in this province. We've invested $14.4 million over four years to create a solar thermal heating incentive program for Ontario businesses, industries and institutions.

I'm also pleased to tell you that the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Energy was created to invest in and encourage research and development of competitive, industrially relevant technologies. The centre's goal is to bring these ideas to the marketplace in order to provide Ontarians with viable, affordable, long-term energy supplies while improving our net impacts on the environment. And Ontario recently invested $2.2 million in a green energy project using innovative water turbines that will generate renewable power from the current of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Our Next Generation of Jobs Fund is a five-year, $1.15-billion program that will create and sustain jobs, improve competitiveness, foster innovation and support our Go Green plan.

Overall, we are working across the government and with the private sector to promote investment and skills training that will continue to fuel our green power strategy.

Mr. Paul Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): There are no points of order.

There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 6:45 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1805.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters
Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (L)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (L)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / procureur general
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margarett R. (L)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (ND)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, government House leader / ministre des Affaires autochtones, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (L)	Barrie	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for seniors / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the committee of the whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (L)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (L)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Tourism / ministre du Tourisme
Gélinas, France (ND)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (L)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
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First Session, 39th Parliament

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de l'Ontario

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 22 April 2008

Mardi 22 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 22 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 22 avril 2008

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance—I'm sorry, I'm supposed to say—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You have to call the order first, yes.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Speaker, I apologize.

Government order 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991, when Bill 35 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time, the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That the vote on second reading may, pursuant to standing order 28(h), be deferred until the next sessional day during the routine proceeding "Deferred votes"; and

That the committee shall be authorized to consider the bill at its next regular meeting following the referral of the bill. The committee shall report the bill to the House not later than the first sessional day that reports from committees may be received following the completion of clause-by-clause consideration, and not later than May 5, 2008. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That when the order for third reading is called, two hours be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill. At the end of which time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may, pursuant to standing order 28(h), be deferred until the next sessional day during the routine proceeding "Deferred votes"; and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 61.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek on a point of order before I recognize the government House leader for his leadoff remarks.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a small correction to an earlier statement: I was incorrect when I stated a million megawatts; what I meant to say was a million solar roofs in California, if that could be added to the record.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

Leading off the debate, I recognize the government House leader.

1850

Hon. Michael Bryant: We are here today to debate, pursuant to standing order 46, a motion that would bring Bill 35 to a vote before this House, specifying in particular the amount of time devoted to clause-by-clause consideration as well as specifying that the order for third reading allot two hours of debate time for the bill, at the end of which time it then goes to a vote.

This is a motion that is necessary at the end of the days of debate that we have had on this particular bill, because while it is a bill which to my understanding has not received vociferous, if any, opposition, nonetheless we were unable to come to an agreement as to how many days of debate would take place. The question then becomes, does the government of the day make a decision to continue debate indefinitely or, on the other hand, is an agreement achievable? No, the agreement was not achievable, and thus here we are in a night sitting debating this particular motion.

It is a night sitting in which we're debating this particular motion, a night sitting that the government brought forward by way of a motion that the government supported and that was opposed by the opposition, these night sittings being necessary at this time in order to ensure that there is an appropriate amount of time for debate in this Legislature. Under the new proposal—and I'll just spend a minute on this before getting back to the motion at hand—we would not be having night sittings. We would not be having this matter debated at night; rather, it would be something that was addressed either in the morning or in the afternoon. I would argue that in fact that is not only something that the opposition parties called for but something that is in the best interests of this House in increasing the quality of the debate.

It is always a case that opposition members are concerned, and sometimes mightily offended, by motions of this sort. The government usually will cite some statistics, which I'm sure we will hear tonight, about how many times time allocation was brought forward by the Harris-Eves Conservative government, and we'll talk about how many times it was brought forward by the NDP government and how the NDP government in fact created the time allocation system we now have. I believe that in fact 60% of the bills were time-allocated under the previous government, the Harris-Eves government. This government has, yes, used time allocation, but less than half of the amount that the previous government used; in fact, about 25% is the number.

This particular bill addresses quality-of-life issues with respect to investing in our municipalities. There will be some discussion—maybe, maybe not—in the debate tonight where members will say that in the good old days there were certain bills that got a lot of attention and a lot of time and a lot of debate, and there were other bills that did not, because they were not seen as highly controversial, because the opposition—whether they agreed or disagreed with them—didn't feel they merited significant debating time. There would be little, and in some cases no, debate at third reading and limited debate at second reading. That's why you saw in fact the number of bills passed by governments—Conservative, I guess, if we're going to go back before 1985. But up to and including 1990 there was this approach.

The House leader for the third party has talked about this at length in this Legislature, and I remember him talking to me about it when I was in opposition. He's raised it in House leaders' meetings as well, the idea of "Okay, we can spend a lot of time on bills that we really want to get into and not a lot of time on the other bills." The problem with all that is, is this one of these bills to which a significant amount of time ought to be devoted?

This is a bill that's based on similar legislation that's been passed by the federal government. The Investing in Ontario Act sets out specific terms for debt repayment and investments of any unanticipated surplus. If there is an unanticipated surplus of $800 million or more, the government pays $600 million to debt reduction. Then there are further discussions about the unanticipated surplus.

I would venture to argue that this would not have been one of those bills in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s about which the House leaders would have said, "This deserves a lot of time. This one is going to, if not invoke a filibuster, at least deserve a lot of attention." I doubt that this one would have received a lot of attention. But under the new system, under the new normal, I suppose you might say—which has been in place, arguably, off and on, but mostly on, since 1990—bills of this nature in fact do get a significant amount of debate.

At some point, the government has to make a decision. In the absence of an agreement being reached, either the government is going to see that this bill is debated day after day and night after night, or the government is going to say, "Well, this seems to be a bill on which we've had ample debate." It is not a matter which would seem to reasonably seize the attention of the House in a way that you think might be aligned with something involving debt repayment and investments, but in fact this does. Under the new normal, this is one of those bills that gets endless debate until such time as the government makes a decision about time allocation. It is unfortunate, the new normal that we are in. I remain hopeful, nonetheless, that we will reach that time where the new normal ends.

There was, I would say, a certain reciprocity that existed over the last 18 years. By that I mean, what comes around goes around. From 1995 forward, the opposition was unwilling to co-operate with the government of the day, the NDP opposition in particular. Why? Because of the lack of co-operation that they saw between 1990 and 1995. Fast forward to 2003, and the same thing: You didn't co-operate with us; we won't co-operate with you. Now we are here in 2008 and the reciprocity continues. At some point, that reciprocity will either come to an end, we'll get some closure on that and we'll get the kind of agreements that we talk about nostalgically, that we'd like to have, or we will find ourselves here debating motions such as that.

I'm not sharing my time because it goes by rotation, if I'm not mistaken, so I will just say in closing that this is never a motion that a government House leader wants to bring. It is part of a new normal that none of us want to have happen, but it is the way in which the Investing in Ontario Act, an important bill that we do need to get passed—

Interjection.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Believe me, municipalities want this, and every mayor and council want it.

I would submit that it's a straightforward bill. While surely changes will want to be made and there will be a desire from the official opposition to have more, plus tax cuts, and with respect to the New Democrats, concern around funding and then at the same time an increase in funding, we do think this is a bill that ought to come to a vote, and that it has been debated thoroughly. Thus we

are here tonight debating it pursuant to this motion. I believe the official opposition is up next in the rotation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased, I suppose, to join this debate, another time allocation debate brought forward by this government. The government House leader began his evening by apologizing because he was out of line with his timing on bringing forth the motion. I hope it's something that he gets used to, because I'm expecting to hear an apology in this House tomorrow—not for me, because he hasn't offended me, but he certainly made accusations against my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I will certainly be interested tomorrow to be hearing that apology. I can't wait to get here, actually. I'm going to be here before 1:30.

1900

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Why, are you apologizing?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I'm not apologizing, but I expect tomorrow—and the Minister of Agriculture might be apologizing too, because she was part of those comments that were made to the member today, accusations against my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington of an illegal act. We will be interested to see if the day starts that way tomorrow.

Anyway, on with the debate on time allocation. The government House leader seemed to want to talk more about the standing order changes, which is interesting, because that's all part of what the problem is here. This government and the government House leader did articulate how previous governments had used time allocation motions when they felt that the business of the House was being ground to a halt by the obstructionist tactics of the opposition. In fact, we have documented proof of some of those things. The member for Welland talks about it himself—how he held this House to ransom, so to speak, for 17 consecutive hours when he did a filibuster. I don't even know exactly what the topic was at the time.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Auto insurance.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Auto insurance. Thank you very much to the member for Simcoe–Grey.

He went on and on for 17 hours on auto insurance and basically ground the business of the House to a halt. The Conservatives—they were in opposition between 1990 and 1995—named every body of water in the province of Ontario in the title of a bill, which went on for hours and hours. But this government has not experienced those kinds of obstructionist tactics from either one of these opposition parties. There is no reason. The debates have carried on and been dealt with, and the government has had their legislation passed. There's never been any reason to bring in those kinds of motions—not like the former member for Scarborough–Rouge River, who had to have members shrouded around him so he could relieve himself in the chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd just caution the member on the use of his language so as to ensure that it continues to be parliamentary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. Excuse me while I relieve myself of some congestion.

When the former member from Scarborough–Rouge River was shrouded by colleagues so he would not be viewed as he relieved himself, to carry on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's exactly what I hope you would avoid in the context of this debate tonight, so I would caution you again.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Those kinds of obstructionist tactics have not been used by the opposition in this Parliament or the previous Parliament, but this government continues to bring forth time allocation motions. They railed on continuously whenever the previous government would bring in any kind of time allocation motion or closure or whatever.

Let's talk about the Investing in Ontario Act, Bill 35. The government went out on a public relations tour or spin tour prior to even introducing this legislation and told the public and municipalities, "Look, here's what's going to happen. If there's a surplus in the province of Ontario of $800 million or more, the first $600 million is going to go to debt reduction and then the next $200 million and so on above that is going to go to municipalities." Well, every municipality out there thought, "Wow, this is great news. We're very, very happy."

I've got to give them credit. They're very good at doing that part of it. They're not very good at keeping their word; we have tons of documented proof of that. But they're very good at spinning that stuff and trying to spin a message and get the word out on something that they want.

The municipalities got this message and said, "Hey, this is great." The prerequisite supportive quotes from municipalities and municipal organizations were rolling in, so that the Minister of Finance and the Premier and the House leader could all quote and say, "Look, this is what a great job we're doing for municipalities. They're all happy. See what they have to say about our proposed Investing in Ontario Act? They're all very, very happy about it." Well, who wouldn't be? They were going to be getting $200 million to start, and there was no question in their minds that they were going to be running surpluses of at least $800 million, because the news was starting to leak out that the government had a huge surplus this year. As it turned out, it was $5 billion. "Oh, but after we've got this store box of quotes"—that's not a prop, Mr. Speaker, that's a bill. "After we've got these quotes lined up, indexed, alphabetical, rated on a scale of one to 10, from 'Really loves the government,' down to the last one, 'Loves the government somewhat'"—because all of those quotes would have been positive—"now we're going to tell the real truth: Here's the budget. We're expecting a $600-million surplus. Sorry, municipalities. Thank you for those nice quotes. We're going to use them and we'll use them over and over again in this House." And they'll say, "Did I say to you what so-and-so from municipality X said? Well, then, let me tell you"—because we're getting them already today, over and over again: the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneur-

ship today bringing out a quote from the convenience store owners that I'm sure was written two and a half years ago. They'll do anything over there.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yeah, exactly. Sooner or later, the member for Davenport will be bringing quotes from the Havana Express or something, and everybody will be thinking that that's a new riding here in the province of Ontario.

Anyway, that's the kind of spin-doctoring that this government does. So they've got all this stuff lined up and then, when things get a little tough and the opposition starts to do as they're supposed to do, and that's ask some tough questions—"Well, look, did you mislead municipalities? Did you intentionally give them misinformation?"—they might ask that kind of question, and the opposition has a responsibility to do just that when they see some misbehaving on the part of the government. And the government is going to say, "Au contraire. Have we read to you the quotes from the municipalities about our Investing in Ontario Act?" And you'll see that all of those quotes came before March 25, the day the budget was tabled.

After the budget was tabled, it hasn't been so sweet. Now the municipalities are saying, "Gee, did we get fed a bill of goods here?" They're very, very skeptical now about anything that might come out of this government. At the end of the fiscal year, of course, they got handed a large part of that $5.2-billion surplus. So people are a little quiet now. Never has a government been so poor at forecasting the year-end.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: It never happened before.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You're right. The member for Essex says that it's never happened before, and he's absolutely right. Never has there been a government, a Minister of Finance and a Premier of this province so inept at forecasting the year-end of this province.

Now you've got municipalities wondering, "What is going to happen in 2008-09? Where are we really going to stand?" You see, this is another little game of Liberal deflecto: "Okay, let's get them off the real issue." The real issue is, what are they actually doing to permanently deal with the financial straits that municipalities find themselves in?

At the AMO conference of 2006, Premier McGuinty promised that within 18 months they'd have a new deal in place, working with municipalities about who's going to pay for what—it's the fiscal capacity review, something to that effect. And here we are here closing in on 24 months. Before you know it, it's going to be August 2008, and what do we have? We have nothing, but they've played political games with it.

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They've thrown a little bit here, a little bit there, which quite frankly has cut the you-know-what right out of the whole committee. Instead of the committee being left to deal with the fiscal imbalance, the government has played politics because they wanted to get re-elected last time, so they announced some for the drug plan. They're talking about more for social housing and all of this and that, and the truth is that it all should have been part of this fiscal review. So they've really neutered the fiscal review before it even came back with its report.

That's the kind of games this government loves to play. They're not really interested in working with the municipalities, finding out what the real problems are and what we can do on a sustained, long-term basis to solve the malaise they find themselves in.

There's never been a winter worse for roads in the province of Ontario than this winter. The municipal roads are in real trouble because the kinds of thermal movements we had in our temperatures this winter really made it difficult for those asphalt surfaces. If you get a long, cold winter that starts cold and stays cold, and the frost gets in the ground and just keeps going deeper, you're going to have some problems in the spring, but not the same kind we've had this winter where it freezes and thaws, freezes and thaws, and water gets in underneath the asphalt and then freezes and expands. That's how you get your potholes, to simplify it. The next thing you know, you've got a real mess on your roads.

This kind of winter has been really hard on them. Municipalities know they've got a lot of work ahead of them, and they want to be able to say, "In 2008-09, this is what we're going to do. In 2009-10, this is what we're going to do," and so on and so forth for at least five years down the road. That's the point of this review. That's what John Tory, our leader, talked about in our platform: sustainable, long-term, dependable, guaranteed funding for municipalities so that they wouldn't have to play the guessing game or play the lottery like this government has forced them to do for four years.

This government talked about improving the situation for municipalities, but when I talk to municipalities in eastern Ontario, they say that their fiscal condition has deteriorated under this government. The fiscal condition has deteriorated. When we met with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus at ROMA this year, their statement was clear, that the fiscal condition of municipalities in eastern Ontario has deteriorated under this government. They want long-term sustainable funding so that they can deal with all these things. They don't want some kind of a shell game. They don't want some kind of hide-and-seek; now you see it, now you don't.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Come on.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's not what they're looking for, I say to my friend from Northumberland–Quinte West. That's not what they're looking for, Lou.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They're looking for something that they can depend on. That's what they want. They don't want some kind of a cat-and-mouse game with $200 million or $600 million. They want something dependable, but now we find out that in this bill it doesn't actually say that that money will be going to municipalities. No, no, no, no. We could have slushgate II, because what it says in the bill to describe eligible recipients—I will quote:

"(2) In this act,

"'eligible recipient' means a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for the purpose of gain or profit."

In layman's language, that sounds like a cricket club.

There was $150 million of the taxpayers' hard-earned money. And you know what? They're really starting to hurt over that. People in my riding who've had a hard time paying their heating bills this winter are starting to hurt about that and worry about that.

The Premier was talking today about public transit. Well, I'm wondering when the subway is going to come to Renfrew county. Our people have to get to and from work, get their kids to and from the hockey rink, go shopping and get the groceries, with a vehicle. The gas prices are hurting them. The cost of heating their homes this winter was abhorrent. And this government gave out $150 million last year to the likes of cricket clubs that didn't even want the money. But because they thought it might get them more votes, they threw out the money.

What they could do for municipalities and what could help is if they would share that gas tax with municipalities, just as the federal government does—and has legislated as permanent—so that rural municipalities aren't left with nothing. There's a nice saying I could use there, Mr. Speaker, but I'm afraid you'd be standing up. If they want to talk about fairness and making sure that the people in this province are treated fairly, what about those people in rural Ontario who have no choice but to drive long distances for the services that people in the cities take for granted? What about them?

The House leader was talking about changes to the standing orders and how they're family friendly. I don't hold him individually responsible for this, but it's just indicative of the kind of mindset of the McGuinty government. It's become so urban-centric, particularly Toronto-centric.

He was quoted in the paper—and I'll paraphrase it because I don't have the newspaper in front of me. He was talking about the move to make this place more family friendly, which these changes have done anything but. They could have just as easily accomplished everything, and we'd be completely in favour of it—you can still have a 9-to-6 calendar. Question period could still be in the afternoon; it doesn't have to be in the morning. This is about making this harder on the opposition and easier for the cabinet ministers, so they can flitzen out of here, like flitzebogen, in the afternoon.

He talked about this being family friendly. He made a comment that, "Now, if we get rid of these night sittings, isn't it going to be nice that an MPP can go to his son's hockey game or his daughter's ballet"—and I'm just paraphrasing—"or have dinner with his or her family?" It's clear that the House leader lives in Toronto. Either that or he's a big Star Trek fan and he figured that somehow I can just say, "Beam me home, Vicky," and I'll be up there to have supper with them. It's just not feasible for people who drive distances and come from a long way to serve here at Queen's Park. But it is indicative of the kind of myopic view of the life of a politician that some politicians here have. They don't really think that much goes on north of Highway 7. But that's on the standing order changes.

We're going to go back to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act. I think I'm running out of time here, much to the disappointment, I know, of my friend from Davenport. I am running out of time. I just want to conclude. I'm getting the nod from the whip. He's finally come to. He was buried in something there.

I want to again say that bringing in this bill was the height of cynicism, playing those kinds of games with our municipalities, with our taxpayers, with this Legislature. These kinds of tricks and these kinds of games are part of the reason that there are creditability issues out there with politicians when they play these kinds of games.

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Mr. Paul Miller: I'm just going to start off tonight with a couple comments on the motion.

This is ironic, to say the least. The minister stands up and talks about expedience on the bill, trying to cut down on the discussion on the bill: "Let's move it through. Let's get it moving in the right direction. It's not an important bill. There doesn't seem to be much opposition to this bill." That is so far from the truth that it's unbelievable.

The ironic part about this is that they want to expedite their bill, they want to push it through, they want us all to be agreeable and work together as a team, yet when I brought Bill 6 to committee—which would've helped people when they lose their severance when plants close down, it would've helped people when they lose their back pay and their holiday pay, it would've helped the workers of this province—not only did they not even read my bill, they didn't even know what the bill was about, and the government members of that committee shot it down before it even got to first base.

So it's ironic that the minister stands up and thinks his bill is wonderful and that we should all agree to it without any long debate on it because it's a wonderful bill. Well, I think it's grossly underfunded and falls short of what we want. So as far as that motion goes, I have real problems with that.

Now to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act: Why do we not want this bill to go through so quickly? Maybe because we have a few problems with it. I'd like to share a few problems I have with this bill. It's the first time I've spoken on Bill 35, and I would like to talk about it.

One of the things we in the opposition benches are well accustomed to under the present government is the introduction of new legislation where pomp and ceremony consistently supplant content and detail. Like cash-starved municipalities, in the budget we had hoped for action in addressing Ontario's mounting infrastructure deficit and the chronic need for repairs and upgrades to our municipal water systems, sewer systems, roads and bridges, as well as the expansion of our transit systems.

New Democrats had hoped that when it came to providing the desperately needed long-term funding for infrastructure investments to protect public health, our environment and our economy, the McGuinty government would have come forward with a sizable down payment on the growing $60-billion deficit facing infrastructure in Ontario municipalities, including the $30-billion to $40-billion deficit in our water and sewage infrastructure alone. But another budget has come and gone and cash-starved municipalities still struggle under provincial downloading, and, consequently, infrastructure renewal on the scale necessary just isn't happening.

Before I discuss the details or, more specifically, the lack of details contained in Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008, I would like to address the issue of municipal infrastructure funding, the issue which this bill was supposed to deal with.

Downloading and infrastructure deficit: As New Democrats have argued time and time again, revenue spent funding provincial programs over the past years has left the municipal cupboard bare, and infrastructure funding has greatly suffered. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that Ontario bridges need $2 billion over the next five years for rehabilitation alone. So it's little wonder why the government's $1-billion end-of-the-year rollout is to be seen as little more than a down payment on what's needed. At the same time, as the lifespan of infrastructure is reaching an end, many municipalities across the province—especially those dependent on agriculture, manufacturing and forestry—are finding their municipal taxpayers overstretched and, increasingly, unemployed.

Losing industry is devastating to the property tax base of Ontario municipalities. In many smaller communities, property taxes on the local industries make up a substantial proportion of the property tax base. So when a mill or plant shuts its doors, municipalities can find themselves having a very difficult time paying their bills. Yet because the McGuinty government is failing to fully fund downloaded provincially mandated services, these same municipalities have little choice but to raise property taxes to cover services which shouldn't be theirs in the first place. So the funding that should be used for infrastructure goes to paying the bill for provincially mandated services downloaded onto our municipalities.

Province-wide, municipal governments presently pick up the following costs for provincially mandated social programs: ODSP and related drug programs, $1.3 billion, of which about $600 million is ODSP; social housing, $879 million; ambulance, $289 million; public health, $250 million; child care, $193 million; total, $3.1 billion.

There was a deathbed repentance by the McGuinty Liberals just prior to the 2007 election campaign, where they promised to eliminate the roughly $660 million for ODSP that municipalities are forced to pay by the year 2011—four years too late. The McGuinty Liberals said they would also upload $173 million for the Ontario drug benefit program, but when we add up the promises and subtract them from the $3.1-billion total, municipalities are still out of pocket over $2 billion—$2 billion of property taxes going to pay for provincial programs when municipalities desperately need those funds to repair roads and other infrastructure, as well as transit.

In the city of Toronto, property taxes increased this year by 3.75%. Why? Because Toronto is forced to bear significant provincial costs due to provincial downloading. Another common scenario, as seen in the region of Waterloo this budget year, is where councils are forced to dip into reserve funds to keep taxes around 4%. In my community of Hamilton, initially 20 years ago 70% of our tax base was industrial or manufacturing; 30% was residential. As of last year, that is exactly the opposite. We in the Hamilton area are one of the highest-taxed people in Ontario, yet we don't have the resources; we don't have the backing of this government to the point where we can even survive. Also, we have the unpopular position of being one of the poorest areas in Ontario: 20% of the people in my area, 20% of 500,000, are living below the poverty level—disgraceful.

Bill 35 specifics: So what's the McGuinty government's response to the public infrastructure deficit across Ontario? A long-term plan with funding certainly is requested by municipalities. No. The McGuinty government's answer is to allow any future provincial surpluses to be allocated to any "eligible entity" at a time when designated long-term funding is required by Ontario municipalities.

The minister announced that he proposed to introduce Bill 35 at a press conference with municipal politicians on March 12, which included the mayor of Mississauga and the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. The minister stated that the bill would be a way to fund municipal infrastructure in times of future surpluses. Now, forget about the fact that there may not be a large enough surplus in the 2007-08 fiscal year to turn over any infrastructure funding in Ontario municipalities, as the estimated surplus has already shrunk from $750 million in the fall economic statement to the $600 million in the budget, both being less than the government has said it required to trigger the legislation.

Forget about all that, because now that we have the legislation in hand, we can see that it's very troubling indeed. The word "infrastructure" is not mentioned once in the legislation. Further, municipalities are not mentioned once in the legislation. This bill may, in the event that surpluses of any size ever return to Ontario, fund eligible recipients. But that does not necessarily mean municipalities, and it doesn't necessarily mean infrastructure.

I ask the minister whether municipal councils across the province, those same municipal councils starving for infrastructure funding, are aware that this bill is not specifically about them and their needs but could include any non-governmental organization to which the government chooses to channel funding. Not only does the cupboard now appear bare, with the surplus required supposedly to trigger this legislation slipping out of sight, or at least the surplus the minister says is required, be-

cause the actual threshold is not stated in the legislation, but also the legislation doesn't guarantee any funding for municipal infrastructure funding, period.

As structured, this legislation is a cruel joke. The enabling and open-ended nature of this legislation does nothing other than create a legislative framework through which the government can potentially roll out any surplus funds at year end to any group they want through an order in council. We know that the McGuinty Liberal government was caught rolling out funding to various groups at the expense of others without proper guidelines in place last year during the slush fund scandal. And I know, I would venture to say, that this legislation is a veiled attempt by the McGuinty government to create a legislative framework for them to continue picking winners and losers in times of budget surpluses. It is seriously flawed in its present state and New Democrats will not be supporting it. We will be amending this legislation so that it applies specifically to municipalities and especially their neglected infrastructure and future needs.

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One is left to wonder, why couldn't we be using this legislative time to do something that would benefit municipalities and their infrastructure needs, like making long-overdue amendments to the Development Charges Act? Instead of spending time providing a legislative framework to inoculate the government against future slush fund scandals, as witnessed last year, why are we not listening to the request of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the people who deal with this every day, the people who know the communities?

The Development Charges Act, to ensure that any future growth pays its own way, should happen now. New Democrats have raised this issue in the past and will continue to call on the McGuinty government to stop subsidizing developers at the expense of municipal governments. But we won't be sanctioning the McGuinty government's desire to be able to channel surpluses away from municipalities and municipal infrastructure, as this bill will do in its present form. What happened under the McGuinty government—and we see it exemplified again in this proposed legislation—is that the content and detail have given way to spin and fluff.

In conclusion, I can say that I'm very disappointed in the lack of communication between the opposition parties and the government as far as sitting down and discussing these bills in detail. It all seems to be announcements in the House, followed up by no committee work. My bill, Bill 6, was the only bill in front of the committee. They didn't read it; they didn't look at it; they shot it down and it went on the backburner—the only bit of business they had to deal with, and they couldn't do that. Yet they stand here today, the minister stands there and says, "Oh, we want co-operation from the opposition. We would like to move this through quickly. This is a good bill. We can't understand why anyone would oppose it. We don't hear any opposition to it."

I don't know if they're walking around with earmuffs on, but there is a lot of opposition to it. It's grossly underfunded. It doesn't do what it has to do for the working people of this province and the municipalities. Until they deal with that, until they're willing to bring it in front of committees and get input from the opposition, who—they claim, "We're all here working together. We're here to work as a team for the people of Ontario." I don't think the word "I" is in the word "team."

I really have big concerns. They're pushing it through. They're not dealing with it. They're not dealing with us. That's the scary part about a majority government. When you have a minority Parliament, more things get done for the people of this province. Until we have another minority Parliament, we are not going to get a heck of a lot done for the benefit of the people in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'd like to add my part to this debate, but before I speak about the Investing in Ontario Act, let me just say a few words in response to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. The member had indicated that our government is really unable to come to grips with the $800 million, in terms of determining what's in the budget.

Let me point out to you how quickly he forgets what happened just a very few short years ago. I remember sitting over here and being somewhat surprised that the forecast of the budget, just before the election took place—do you remember that? What was the difference when they were saying to us that the budget is balanced? That's when we went into an election, assuming that the budget was balanced. What was the difference in the budget?

Interjection.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: We're not simply talking about a few million. I know that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke doesn't want to hear this. Look, he's turned his back. He's turned his back on the fact that the budget was out by $5.6 billion. We're not talking about $1 million here. No. We're talking about the Conservative approach just before the election was called. It was not $1 million, but it was $5.6 billion.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On point of order, Mr. Speaker: I need to point out to the member from Davenport that the fiscal year ended six months after they were elected.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I don't think that's a point of order.

I'll return to the member from Davenport.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Whatever the member says now is really questionable because he didn't want to hear the point of $5.6 billion. If you're responding to my point, why don't you just admit that you were wrong by $5.6 billion, and we can continue with the debate? We can continue with the debate. Just accept it, apologize to the people of Ontario and say, "We were wrong by $5.6 billion."

I want you to know why the Liberal government got elected in the first place.

Interjections.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, look: They are shouting us down.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the member for Davenport to make his remarks through the Chair.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: They are shouting us down. Why? It's clear to see why they're shouting us down. They want to forget what $5.6 billion could buy. Today, let's look at the facts, and I would also appreciate—

Interjections.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Yes, Mr. Speaker, again, shouting us down. Why? Because they were wrong by $5.6 billion.

Interjection.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I was quiet and I listened to you very respectfully. I was quiet and listened to you because I wanted to prepare the response to your point of why we may be out by $1 billion or $2 billion in a budget that has billions of dollars in it. Yet at the same time, if you are in a glass house, remember this: Don't throw stones. Don't call the kettle black; remember that. That's an important item. If you ever stand up again and want to criticize this government being out by a few thousand or a few million dollars, I want you to remember that you were out by $5.6 billion. I think that is a deficit that is still unforgivable. That's the reason why on this side of the House we are more believable than a debt of $5.6 billion.

Let me turn to the NDP. They were quiet up to this point.

Interjections.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: They were very quiet but now they are beginning to speak. Look at them. Why doesn't the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek explain to us, to this House tonight, why they voted against the Spadina subway extension? Tell us that, please. We are ready in this budget to commit the funds to have the people of Toronto able to go to York University by subway. Now, what's wrong with that? What's wrong with having people of Toronto being able to access a university by subway? What's wrong with that? You stand there in your place and you expect—

Mr. Paul Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm very concerned about the outburst from the member across. The member is throwing accusations and throwing my name around. I wasn't even here when they voted—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You don't have a point of order.

The member for Davenport has the floor.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: It's not a point of order. I did not throw your name around. I just wanted you to explain to the people—and let's face it, you're really making a point that doesn't have anything to do with the subway. Okay.

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't live in Toronto.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: It doesn't matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd just ask the member for Davenport to take a seat. Decorum in this House will be enhanced if the member for Davenport would make his comments through the Chair. I would ask him to do so.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The main point of all of this is that this government for the first time is giving two cents per litre to whom? To the municipalities. And you know what? They voted against it.

Interjection.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: You voted for it or you voted against it. Tell the people of Ontario why you would do that. Tell me this.

Interjection.

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Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Is it true or not? How did you vote? You voted against the tax funds for transit.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member for Davenport: This is I think the third time I've asked him to make his comments through the Chair, and I would ask him to do so.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, I see nothing in the standing orders that prevents me from pointing over there.

If you want to say anything, I will listen to you respectfully, as I hope you'll listen to me.

Mr. Paul Miller: I didn't attack you personally.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Look, I did not attack you personally. The question here is, does the NDP really care about municipalities? Let's have the record straight. You voted against gas tax funding for public transit.

Mr. Paul Miller: Who did?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The NDP. You voted against uploading public health. You voted against increased infrastructure funding for roads and bridges. They voted against the Spadina subway extension, they voted against the gas tax funding for transit, they voted against increased funding for the arts and they voted, above all else, against more affordable housing. Is this true or not? Is this a fact or is this not a fact?

Mr. Paul Miller: No.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: You voted against affordable housing. I've got many more facts. Let me simply point out one more thing, if I may. This goes directly to the heart of this issue and to this bill. What does the mayor of Mississauga say about this?

Interjection: Can you give us the date of that vote?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: It says here, and I've the quote, March 12, 2008. That's the date. Is that what you want? What does it say? The mayor of Mississauga says, "It's a step in the right direction." Right. Now hold on.

What does Doug Reycraft, the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, say? That includes all the municipalities. What does he say about this? He says very simply, "This is another significant step in the province's commitment to partnering with municipalities to help ease the infrastructure challenges they are facing."

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm now going to caution the opposition to refrain from heckling the member for Davenport, and again ask the member for Davenport to make his comments through the Chair, and that would help us to enhance the decorum in the House.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: There are many more quotes that I have here, but my time is up. I want to say thank you very much to you and to my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I do want to say to the member for Parkdale–High Park—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Davenport.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —Davenport: Holy crow, that was even longer than one of your petitions. There's a motion on one of your petitions, but even longer than one of my colleague's petitions.

I'm always pleased to rise in the assembly to speak to a bill, but it's unfortunate that we find ourselves once again rising to speak to a time allocation motion by the government, which is effectively killing debate on Bill 35, the so-called Investing in Ontario Act.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The executioner was in here earlier.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I did see the executioner, I say to my colleague for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, walk in with his sickle and cowl on his head as he brought down the guillotine on Bill 35.

It's surprising, because I don't think in any way that this opposition has been obstructionist. We are debating the bill because we oppose this bill. It creates a new form of slush fund for the Dalton McGuinty government. They certainly have demonstrated it with their $1-million funding announcement, by way of example, for the Ontario cricket club, but they really don't deserve the trust of taxpayers when it comes to Liberal slush funds.

A lot of the same gang that operated those famous slush funds for Jean Chrétien are now here at Queen's Park, so once bitten, twice shy. Twice bitten is a new expression; I don't know what that means. So there's a reason to be skeptical.

We were raising valid points on Bill 35. We, hopefully, will have a chance in committee to suggest reasonable amendments to the bill. If the government is adamant to pass it, we will look for reasonable amendments, and hopefully we'll win support from government members.

I know my colleagues in the third party—the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek was speaking earlier and the member for Toronto–Danforth as well—similarly have concerns about the new powers that the government wants to give itself to spend slush funds in the middle of summer; not by coincidence, I'm sure, before the next election as well. Just like we saw the last Dalton McGuinty slush fund throw out all kinds of money to various groups to buy their support before the election campaign, this would make that an annual event, and then would occur probably in August or September 2011, just before the writ is dropped for the next campaign.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Just before the weather really warmed up. They'd call it the annual slush party.

Mr. Tim Hudak: A good line by my colleague from Renfrew.

So we have raised legitimate concerns about this bill. They are legitimate concerns. I know my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke brought up earlier that the minister had said that municipalities would be receiving this money given a certain surplus level, knowing full well what the surplus was going to be. It was only a week before he introduced the legislation that he had the press conference with municipal representatives and talked about all this funding that was going to municipalities, leaving the impression—whether he did so intentionally or not; I think he did—with municipalities that this money was going to flow and they were going to have all kinds of funds coming out as a result of the surplus, knowing full well what the surplus was going to be.

I can say this with great certainty, because when the finance minister was called to lower the tax rate by the official opposition, to give a break to working families and seniors or to help create a better investment climate in Ontario—similarly called on to do that by the federal finance minister—the Ontario finance minister, Mr. Duncan, basically in reply said, "Well, the budget's already written. It's been written for some time and it's at the printers." I think he actually knew what the surplus was going to be when he made this announcement. He brought in a surplus of $600 million when the trigger point was to be $800 million, according to his press conference.

So we have good reasons to be skeptical about the government's true intentions around this bill. We have brought them up in debate, and now we find ourselves tonight with a time allocation motion, effectively ending debate on this bill now—brought the hammer down.

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: One of my colleagues across the floor says, "About time." Well, I don't think we were using delaying tactics. We weren't ringing bells; we were bringing thoughtful suggestions forward on this bill, and the government decides, "Well, that's it, we're cutting off debate."

I guess that's suitable, Mr. Speaker, because as you well know, earlier today we were debating rule changes in the Ontario Legislature that the government has brought forward under the guise of being family friendly. They're anything but, particularly for young parents who come from outside of Toronto. Under the new rules, they will probably find it more difficult to participate in debates, and it's discouraging to women and men with young children who live outside of Toronto.

But the most upsetting thing is the way they are limiting the access of the press to ministers, and limiting the access of the press to have stories from question period for their afternoon news. You may be aware that on April 22, which is today, the press gallery in a rather unprecedented move—I'm not familiar with another time when the press gallery has written a letter like this to the

government, to the Premier and Mr. Bryant. They said the following: "Gallery members have grave misgivings the new schedule would limit access to cabinet ministers and the Premier by reporters in the following ways."

They talked about post—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I caution the member to speak to the motion that is before the House. I return to the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I appreciate that. I'm trying to make the point that it's sadly unsurprising that we have the time allocation motion before the assembly that's consistent with the pattern this government has adopted in a pique of second-term arrogance, to try to limit the ability of opposition members to hold them to account. The press gallery notes that, "The new schedule would cut this access to cabinet in half.

"The gallery considers that any reduction in access would undermine the function of a free press at Queen's Park."

Their third point: "Losing the access to ministers after question period in the afternoons makes it more difficult for reporters to get reaction to news stories breaking later in the day." I won't belabour that point, although it's an important one because it shows Dalton McGuinty's true view of the Legislature.

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I know my colleagues opposite were probably quite outraged, like I was, when Dalton McGuinty suggested that members of his own caucus don't work before noon. Dalton McGuinty said something to the effect that how could he tell Ontario families that work in the Legislature wouldn't start by 9? I know that members of the Liberal Party are probably very upset with the way their Premier characterized them as not working before 1:30 in the afternoon. I was outraged, and I know you are as well. I hope that you bring it up in caucus. I hope that you have the guts to stand up in caucus and say to the Premier that this is outrageous that he told his own members, effectively, that they're lazy. The Premier stood here in the Legislature and said that his own members in the assembly don't start work till 1:30 p.m. The member for Huron–Bruce hopefully had the guts to stand up in caucus and call the Premier on this, because that's exactly what he said.

The other issue here is that the minister claimed that his bill, Bill 35, which is the subject of the guillotine motion—the time allocation motion—tonight, was modelled on federal Bill C-48. Federal Bill C-48 was brought forward by the then Paul Martin government. I know that there are a lot of Paul Martin supporters here in the assembly and a lot of Stéphane Dion supporters among the Liberal caucus members here tonight. Why they are strong supporters of Stéphane Dion, I'm not sure, but I know that there are a lot of Stéphane Dion supporters on the Liberal benches. This was Paul Martin's Bill C-48. It was short-lived. It lasted, by the design of the bill, two fiscal years only. Bill 35, brought forward by the finance minister, is entirely different. It would be in perpetuity. This legislation would envision the government annually doing these summertime slush funds to Liberal friends. The Paul Martin bill, at the very least, was only two years before it sunsetted.

Also, Bill C-48 detailed in legislation specifically where the funds would go. My colleague from Renfrew and my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek both noted that the word "municipalities" is not even mentioned in Bill 35. The word "infrastructure" is not mentioned at all in Bill 35. In fact, the bill gives cabinet very expansive powers to give grants to just about any group under the sun, as long as they're not-for-profit. Just by way of example, cricket clubs: Cricket clubs could receive funding under Bill 35.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They'd have to be Liberal-friendly.

Mr. Tim Hudak: As my colleague says, it looks like the only qualification, judging by the act we saw last time, is that they're Liberal-friendly.

Bill C-48 was for two fiscal years. It said, "The enactment authorizes the Minister of Finance"—again, this is federal—"to make certain payments out of the annual surplus in excess of $2 billion in respect of the fiscal years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 for the purposes and in the aggregate amount specified. This enactment also provides that, for its purposes, the Governor in Council may authorize a minister to undertake a specified measure."

Then Bill C-48, supposedly the model for Bill 35 before the assembly, gets into actual allocation of payments: "(a) for the environment, including for public transit and for an energy-efficient retrofit program for low-income housing, an amount not exceeding $900 million"—so it's clear what the funding would be used for and the exact amount of the surplus that would be so designated; "(b) for supporting training programs and enhancing access to post-secondary education, to benefit, among others, aboriginal Canadians, an amount not exceeding $1.5 billion." Again, they specify the groups that would receive the funding and the amount of funding clearly in the legislation itself.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No cricket clubs in there, right?

Mr. Tim Hudak: A cricket club has not been mentioned yet, although I do have sections (c) and (d) to get to still: "(c) for affordable housing, including housing for aboriginal Canadians, an amount not exceeding $1.6 billion; and

"(d) for foreign aid, an amount not exceeding $500 million."

Bill C-48 outlined specifically the amount of funding to be set aside and the purposes and the particular groups that would receive grants if the bill were passed. It was passed. The NDP supported it. This was part of the Jack Layton and Paul Martin accord. This was part of that package, and it did pass at the time. The Conservative Party of Canada did oppose this legislation. It's no longer in existence because, as I said, it was sunsetted.

At the end of day, though, the fact is that if the Liberal government and the finance minister and the Premier

truly wanted to allocate slush funds to municipalities or other groups, they would have done one of a few things.

First, they would have actually put that in the bill. As I said, we oppose the bill. I think a sensible amendment that the Progressive Conservatives may bring forward, however, if the government still plans on doing this, would be to actually put in the legislation, through amendment, "for municipalities and for infrastructure." If that's truly what they were interested in, they would actually put that in the legislation.

Secondly, you could follow the model of C-48, which the government says it's trying to do, by being much more specific in the legislation, rather than leaving this wide-open section with respect to slush funds, as they have done with this bill.

In fact, Carolyn Parrish, a former federal Liberal member and now a councillor in Mississauga—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Running for mayor.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague from St. Catharines says she's running for mayor, which could very well be the case—did pin the tail, so to speak, by saying that this legislation is a ruse by the government; it is not about support for municipalities.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Hazel likes it.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, I'm not sure. My colleague says that the mayor of Mississauga likes it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What's the date of that quote, Jim?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Yes, I think that quote that she gave may be stale-dated, because she gave that quote far before she saw the details that this would be contingent on a surplus of $800 million or more and that municipalities and infrastructure were not in the bill.

So I regret that we have to rise to speak to a time allocation motion once again on a bill on which we have been constructive in opposition. We will have our suggestions at committee, and I hope we will have government members' support for those amendments, to truly make it about funding for municipalities, if that is the true purpose of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This evening, I have been asked by my House leader to come and talk to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008. Quite honestly, I didn't expect, when I got my House schedule, that time allocation would be imposed. I think, on the part of the government House leader, this is a fundamental error. It's reflective, I think, of second-term arrogance on the part of this government. Quite honestly, this is an important bill, but I had no sense from the opposition or from my colleagues that we were going to spend days talking this to death. People were making substantive points about the content here. But for whatever reason, this government that has in the last few weeks found that we were running out of debate in the evenings has decided to put forward closure on this bill. That's extraordinary to me. Why on earth was this required? What feverish moment seized the government House leader and made him say, "You know, I need to kill off debate on this one"?

It has to be said that this is a terrible bill. It has to be said that this bill is not what was advertised when the press conference first occurred. What we have before us is not directed toward municipalities.

But I will get into that a bit later. I want to go back to this whole question of time allocation. It is not as though this debate was held up. I would say, in fact, that debate on this bill was slowly winding down. I don't see this bill as crucial or central to the government's agenda, because we're talking about disposition of surpluses that may well not arise. Because we're not talking about actually dealing in a substantial way with solving the fiscal problem that confronts municipalities in Ontario, you have to ask yourself, what was so crucial about this bill to force it through? Why on earth would you time-allocate a bill the debate of which has slowly been coming to an end?

I have to go back to the suggestion that this reflects an attitude on the part of the government House leader. That attitude has come through very strongly in the changes to the standing orders, something that most folks in the real world out there who may be watching this tonight don't spend a lot of time thinking about. They don't wake up at 3 in the morning and think, "Oh, my God, the standing orders at Queen's Park are being changed. How will I eat my breakfast in the morning? How will my children be able to feed themselves?" Because, in fact, the standing orders don't seize them.

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But I want to say, because it ties back directly to this whole question of democracy, accountability and closure, that what's been brought forward by this government, in essentially moving question period to reduce the accountability of the government, reduce the accessibility of ministers to reporters—what this government is doing is further reducing and controlling the information that comes out of Queen's Park, so that you, voters and citizens in this province, have less knowledge about what's going on at Queen's Park, less ability to hold politicians to account, less control and, ultimately, less democracy.

Mr. Hudak was reading a letter from the Queen's Park press gallery. In fact, that letter read out today made it very clear that the reporters who cover this place know that their ability to get answers, to probe, to put information out into the general public, will be reduced by what this government is doing. That's entirely consistent with this second-term arrogance that we're seeing from the government House leader.

I want to say to people that it is crucial that the citizenry and opposition parties are able to hold government to account. No government is all-knowing—one can hope that no government is all-seeing—and they will, without a doubt, setting aside partisan issues, make mistakes from time to time. Let's set it aside as a partisan issue and just say that you have a bunch of people who are given the responsibility for running this province. From time to time they will make mistakes, and it is our job, those of

us on the opposition benches and those who sit up in the press gallery, to hold them to account when we see things going off the tracks. When the government presses down, squeezes down, makes it difficult for people to get information, makes it difficult for information to get out, then the ability to correct those errors is substantially reduced.

I've been here now for two years and about a month, so not a long history at Queen's Park, but I had the opportunity in question period to watch as the commitment to shutting down coal-fired power in this province unravelled. It was the questions that were put in question period—not the answers, because, frankly, we didn't get much in the way of answers. What we got was some truly inspired Fred Astaire-type dancing, something that everyone should have an opportunity to witness. Frankly, what we got was not answer period but question period, and it was question period that was able to bring out what was really happening.

That's the crucial part about democracy. When people write to me or phone my office and say, "What can be done about this? How can we hold this government to account?" I talk to them about the need to make what the government is doing public, known to the great mass of citizens in this province. That's what's crucial.

I was here last year when we went through the whole slushgate stuff, the whole citizenship and immigration dispensing of sums of money through the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's office. It was quite extraordinary as we started digging into that story. We were told that what was happening was dispensation of year-end funds. This is a ministry with a budget of $90 million a year dispensing something—if I remember correctly—around $30 million. I have to say to you who are watching this, and to you, Speaker, who is patiently listening to this, that when you have a ministry with a budget of $90 million that has left-over funds at the end of the year of $30 million, it's right and proper to ask questions: "What is really going on?" And the ability for us, day in and day out, to hammer the government and make sure that that press gallery could hear and that press gallery could start asking their own questions was crucial to making sure that that government was held to account.

I have to say to those who are watching that my first intimation of problems was when I got a call from friends in the Bangladeshi community at Victoria Park and Danforth, saying that they'd seen a press conference with someone who really had not had a history of doing work in the community getting a quarter-million-dollar grant—a bit of a shock. That's a fair amount of cash for a community that has been facing great difficulties.

As that story unfolded, because we had question period, because the press gallery was in a position to put the heat on, the reality is that that broke things open as to what was really going on—the Auditor General was brought in—to the extent that this government is doing everything it can to close down debate and shut down the media agenda. Democracy is not served.

People have to know—you, the public, have to know—how the media canvass can be manipulated and shaped by a government that has very large resources. It was interesting to me last summer going to a press conference that the Premier gave at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre on climate change. He gave his press conference, there were a bunch of people there talking, a bunch of people commenting, and it got very bad reviews. Later that day, the Premier did another press conference about his money for manufacturing that wiped out all the coverage on the climate change story. It was a bad story, and they squashed it. They realized they weren't getting good coverage, and they squashed it.

I will say this to you right now: The standing orders that are coming forward will be used in the same way. We will have question period in the morning, and if it goes badly, dollars to doughnuts, in the afternoon there will be a substantial announcement made to blot out the coverage from morning question period.

What we're seeing here with time allocation is reflective of that anti-democratic approach that is starting to infect this government, and one that this government should be very leery of.

Having talked about the time allocation and the substantial problems with how this government, frankly, is bringing on themselves criticism that they could have avoided by simply letting this bill go through its normal span of debate—again, I think it's beyond tactics, but at least tactically, the government House leader made a huge miscall on time-allocating this bill. This bill, Bill 35, for those who are interested, this little sheaf of paper, is nothing more than a legislative veil behind which the Liberal Party can keep flowing funds to chosen groups in Ontario at the expense of other groups that are equally in need of government support.

If you live in a municipality or a city in Ontario, you know the difficulties that are faced. You have driven on the potholed roads. You have gone into community buildings that have been in bad shape. You've heard about the bridge that collapsed down in Essex. You've heard from—

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Chatham–Kent, thank you—just so that there's a correction of the record. I thank the member.

I have to say as well that the MPP from Timmins–James Bay talked about the deterioration of a bridge in his riding, to the point where there's only one lane left. I talked to John Sewell, a well-known critic of municipal issues in this province, about his experience in going out to talk to regional municipalities in rural Ontario where they don't have the money or the resources to keep the bridge infrastructure in good shape. The member from Timmins–James Bay was right last week when he pressed hard for this government to take on the approach that's being taken on in Quebec, where municipalities with a population of less than 100,000 have their bridge maintenance expenses turned back to the province.

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Hon. James J. Bradley: With Ontario money.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The reality is that Quebec learned the hard way, very brutally, that you cannot neglect infrastructure. Unfortunately, this bill is not going to correct that problem. If you look at this bill, you will find that municipalities are not referenced anywhere in the bill and neither is infrastructure. When the bill was announced, it was announced specifically as designed to address municipal infrastructure shortfalls.

Even if the McGuinty government has promised to share surplus funds from 2007-08 with cash-strapped municipalities, there's a reality that as our economy faces tougher and tougher times, there's less and less likelihood that there will in fact be a surplus available to share. Frankly, even if that's not the case, there's no planable assurance that in fact in future years that surplus will be available for infrastructure. In fact, it's fair to say that this bill is a cruel joke when it comes to Ontario's municipalities.

I've sat on Toronto city council. Many of those in this chamber have sat on city councils. I think a number of them have been mayors. They know what it's like when the time comes to actually set that budget and deal with the fact that they have problems before them that have to be dealt with, that may well be life-threatening, may well be life-and-limb risking, and yet they find themselves completely cash-strapped.

As my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek said in his speech, the shortfall from downloading that municipalities face in this province is around $3 billion. That is a very large burden for them to carry. If you wonder why your municipality is not maintaining roads, community centres and other infrastructure the way it should, his comments illuminate why, because these expenses have been dumped on them.

I asked the Minister of Transportation just the other day about resumption of 50% sharing of transit operating costs in this province. Transit is crucial to making sure our cities are livable. If we want to clean up the air, if we want to deal with smog, if we want to make sure that people can get to work, if we want to make sure that companies are not held up, not finding their workers and their goods trapped in gridlock, we have to have funding for transit. We have to have funding for transit operations. We don't have that. We have municipalities from Ottawa to Windsor, from Toronto to Thunder Bay, faced with huge financial burdens.

This bill, which is supposed to address that, does not. People should know that this bill uses a formula that will be determined by regulation—we actually don't have the formula before us; we don't get to vote on that in this House—that will allocate any fiscal surplus to eligible recipients.

Now I'm just going to take a moment and read out the definition of "eligible recipients."

"3(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations,

"(a) prescribing eligible recipients and classes of eligible recipients for the purposes of this act;

"(b) prescribing the purposes for which payments may be made under this act;

"(c) prescribing the method of and the basis for calculating payments to be made under this act;

"(d) prescribing activities in which the Minister of Finance may engage in furtherance of the purposes of this act;

"(e) prescribing, for the purposes of the definition of 'B' in subsection 2(2), the amount, if any, of the surplus for a fiscal year to be allocated to the reduction of the accumulated deficit shown in the province's consolidated financial statements for the fiscal year."

"'Eligible recipient' means a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for the purpose of gain or profit."

Municipalities don't get named. Infrastructure and its repair and maintenance is not identified as a reason for the existence of this legislation. So if you and your municipality today are worried about how it's going to function in future, don't think that this act, these few pages, is actually going to give you the relief that you need, that your community needs, that your city or town or village needs. It isn't there.

What this will do, however, is in future impose some discipline, some order, and thus some cover so that a government like this, this Liberal government, can avoid future slushgate scandals, because in future, all those slushy funds that are rolled out the door will have been sanctioned through this legislation. So everyone will know that at the end of the year, there is potential for this stuff to be there, to be grabbed, and it will all be nice and clean, sparkling, put out on the clothesline. And in the end, the cities and the towns in this province will not have their infrastructure needs dealt with, and we in this Legislature will be hearing from our angry constituents talking about the state of their cities and their towns.

On March 12, the Minister of Finance brought municipal politicians to Queen's Park. He held a press conference and talked about launching this proposed Investing in Ontario Act. Who came? Mississauga Mayor McCallion, the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Doug Reycraft. And in that press conference, Finance Minister Duncan clearly stated this act was about using any provincial surplus to help municipalities fund infrastructure such as social housing, roads and transit.

I'll read the press release, because I've given you a bit from the act. So compare and contrast what was said at the press conference.

"Government Targeting Surpluses for Roads, Transit and Social Housing"—that was the headline. It seems to be straightforward to me. I don't know. I learned to read in an Ontario school. The words are straightforward.

"March 12 ... The Ontario government is proposing legislation that would dedicate additional surpluses to Ontario's communities.

"The proposed bill, which would be called the Investing in Ontario Act, would direct a portion of provincial surpluses to municipalities for infrastructure needs, such

as improving roads and bridges, expanding transit and upgrading social housing."

I don't know about you, I don't know about you folks out there who are watching this, but that sounds fairly straightforward to me. I would have thought when I read this act I'd see words like "municipality," "infrastructure," "roads," "transit," "housing."

Here are some of the quotes:

"'The proposed Investing in Ontario Act would strike a balance by ensuring that surpluses would go to both debt reduction and to government priorities,' said Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan." Ah, this is a good one: "'Investing in municipal infrastructure not only addresses the capital needs of our communities, but it also creates more jobs in the short term and prosperity in the long run.'"

Well, my goodness, I think that's a true statement: investing in municipalities and their infrastructure. It's unfortunate that this bill does not explicitly do that. In fact, this bill is extraordinarily vague.

What did Mr. Watson have to say?

"'This proposed legislation is another clear demonstration of our government's commitment to treating municipalities as true partners in building stronger Ontario communities,' said Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Jim Watson."

Minister, I have to ask you: Were you given a copy of this act before you went into this press conference?

Let me read the explanatory note. For those who haven't read legislation before, for us legislators there's essentially a Coles Notes version at the beginning. It just takes a few pages and it boils it down. I'll just read those, because you've just heard what was said at the press conference.

"Explanatory Note: The Investing in Ontario Act, 2008 authorizes the Minister of Finance to make payments out of money appropriated by the Legislature to certain persons and entities that do not carry on their activities for the purpose of gain or profit."

I'll step aside for a moment. Municipalities could fit into that definition, but they are not expressly targeted as the recipients of these funds.

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"The total payments made under the new act in each fiscal year shall not exceed the lesser of,

"(a) the amount appropriated by the Legislature; and

"(b) the amount that would otherwise be the annual surplus for that fiscal year less the prescribed amount, if any, of that surplus allocated to the reduction of the accumulated deficit.

"The new act authorizes the Minister of Finance to determine the terms and conditions on which payments may be made.

"The Lieutenant Governor in Council is authorized to prescribe by regulation the recipients to whom payments may be made, the purposes for which payments may be made, the method of and basis for calculating the payments, the activities in which the Minister of Finance may engage in furtherance of the purposes of this act and the amount of the surplus, if any, for a fiscal year that must be allocated to the reduction of the province's accumulated deficit.

"Complementary amendments are made to the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991."

Well, I have to say, having gone through the Coles Notes version, there's no mention of municipalities, there's no mention of infrastructure, and there's no commitment of the government to actually deal with those fundamental problems. So you have to ask: What in fact is this act about? Because it is not as advertised.

I remember once—I'd lived in Toronto for a few years—I read about a vacuum cleaner that was on sale at a shop in the west end at a great price. I took the streetcar down and found out they were out of stock. They did have vacuum cleaners, but they were like 50% more. And, you know, the guy would give me a real deal; he'd take 10 bucks off, so that would be 40% more than what was advertised. I think "bait and switch" is the term, and I think that's what we have here. We have a vacuum cleaner salesman who has moved on to greater things, who has decided that municipalities and vacuum cleaners are all the same in the end. "We're going to put forward an act that allows us to do all kinds of interesting things with groups that we have"—what can I say?—"some tender feelings towards, that are not necessarily municipalities or infrastructure," when in fact there's a huge need to deal with those issues.

I was in estimates last year with the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. It was interesting to me that that ministry had not thought about how to deal with the impact of climate change on infrastructure. And in fact in Peterborough, twice in this decade, we've had the downtown flooded out; in the city of Toronto, we've had Finch Avenue West washed out. That's a big street, folks. For those who haven't seen it, we're not talking about a little laneway; we're talking about a big road. We have had substantial damage, I believe, to the Highland Creek sewage treatment plant from a very large storm. So municipalities that have been struggling for a long time, facing big financial challenges, carrying this burden of a $3-billion download, face future costs. This bill that is advertised the way that cheap vacuum cleaner was advertised is not going to solve their problem.

You know that many people, many financial analysts and business page writers, talk about the potential for rough times in the Ontario economy. And we all know who is going to carry the bill for that: municipalities that are already cash-strapped. They need substantial, predictable, material assistance to make sure that our cities run well, because if they don't run well, first of all, our citizens suffer—that frankly should be enough, but I'll add that the economy of this province is undermined. People don't like investing in places that are coming unglued. And to the extent that we don't actually put the money in the infrastructure so that we have a fully functional urban infrastructure wherever we have cities, we

undermine our ability to attract investment and ensure that people are employed.

I have to say, I wouldn't be surprised if there were some who supported this bill. I would say it goes beyond the members of the Liberal Party. I would say there are those who are hopeful that when the roulette wheel stops spinning and the ball finally drops into the groove, perhaps their organization will feel the warmth of the finance minister's smile cast upon them.

This bill will have given the finance minister all the tools and structure that he needs to do that. The municipalities will be standing out in the rain. They will have broken umbrellas, and they will not be happy campers. But some people, some organizations that benefited from largesse last year, a largesse that was investigated by the Auditor General, may well be happy with this bill.

This bill is essentially writing a blank cheque to the finance minister so he can dish out surpluses as he or she should wish. It is not a bill that can be supported by anyone in this Legislature who wants to hold a government to account. Frankly, the time allocation that we are discussing right now is one that is a fundamental error on the part of this government and one they should not have put forward.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to stand up and speak in support of the time allocation motion and Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act. When this bill was introduced in the House sometime in March, I looked at the bill and read it. I listened to the Minister of Finance when he introduced it, the reason and intent behind the whole bill, and I thought to myself: "All my colleagues from both sides of the House are going to support it, because they want to support investment in municipalities. They want to give the ability to the Ministry of Finance, if they have some extra dollars, to invest it back in municipalities, especially when it exceeds $600 million."

I was shocked and surprised when we came back to the debate. I see members from both parties, NDP and Conservative, standing up and speaking against this bill. I thought that for the first time, with great hope, people would support the municipalities across the province of Ontario.

On this side of the House, as the government, we believe strongly in working together—between municipalities and the province—because we believe strongly that that's the only way we can be prosperous, where we will be able to enhance our ability and progress toward the future, because we believe strongly that with that partnership, we can enable our municipalities to deal with their infrastructure needs: to fix the bridges, the roads, whatever they need.

I know from the past budget that our government, two times, in two different fashions, invested more than $1 billion in the municipalities. The first time was $400 million that went across the province of Ontario. It went to all the municipalities. I know our share in London was about $6 million and some change, to help my city of London fix their roads and their bridges. The second time around, we got the chance to receive $11 million to be invested in an innovation park, to prepare that park to welcome the many different companies that want to invest in London.

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I think it was a good initiative. It all came because of our government's idea, philosophy and ideology: to invest in the communities and municipalities and give them the chance to be a full partner with us. This bill came to continue that direction, to invest more in municipalities, because as you know, many colleagues spoke before me, talking about the needs out there in the municipalities for roads, bridges, infrastructure, many different elements. Those municipalities need our support badly. That's why the bill came: to give us the ability to invest whatever extra we might have after we have a surplus of more than $600 million, to go to the municipalities.

I think it's a very good initiative. It's an important initiative to create a mechanism to enable our Minister of Finance and our government to continue to invest in municipalities. I wonder why the Conservatives and the NDP don't like this investment in municipalities.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's not enough money.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's not enough, but it's a good step in the right direction. I hope they change their minds when it comes to voting and come with us to support this bill, because it's about time to move forward and work together to support our municipalities and our government. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd also like to speak to this time allocation bill this evening. A lot of points have already been covered, but I'll try and elaborate on some that haven't been spoken to.

I had the opportunity in February to attend the Good Roads-ROMA conference here in Toronto where a number of our municipal partners were in attendance. At that time, having the opportunity to speak to a number of the municipal leaders from around southwestern Ontario, a number of them indicated to me in meetings that we had with our Conservative caucus—we had opportunities to meet with those members and one municipal leader said, "It's awful to come here every year and wait for municipal announcements. You feel like a number of salivating dogs waiting to have a bone or morsel tossed to you." I thought about that a lot, and I've talked to some of my colleagues about that since then. That's an awful way for our municipal partners to speak, that they feel that way about themselves, waiting every year for a government that might have the wherewithal or might give some charitable remains, whatever's left. It reminds you of a movie, the Remains of the Day, where they might cast whatever is left over to those municipal partners.

Some of the messages that were in some of the numerous editorials: "The McGuinty Liberals are only trying to legalize slush funds"; "Their practice of year-end spending condemned by the Auditor General every year for skirting normal accountability and control provisions"; "The Minister of Finance wants to share surpluses with municipalities, yet both the words 'municipalities' and

'infrastructure' are conspicuously absent from this bill that he proposed in this House. Instead, it appears that any group, such as 'cricket clubs' or other entities operating not for profit will also be eligible for such funds."

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I see our good member there from St. Catharines.

"Municipalities need stable and predictable long-term funding. If the provincial-municipal funding review had been conducted in a timely manner, such a funding arrangement could have been included in this year's budget. This announcement makes it clear that the McGuinty Liberals have no real interest in paying down the debt and no real interest in helping municipalities."

Mr. Bruce Crozier: The debt that you ran up.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to add that I wasn't here to run up any debt. Now, there are other members who are in this House who helped contribute to that, most of them on that side of the House. Unfortunately, I was not one of those. I would have probably done something different at that time. There were a number of members who were here. However, I wasn't part of that. I would have liked to have been, but I'm here now.

Minister Duncan also suggested that of surpluses of $800 million or greater, $600 million of that would go toward debt repayment and the rest would go to municipal infrastructure. Surpluses less than $800 million would go towards debt repayment entirely. However, the actual act itself gives far greater discretion to cabinet than Duncan's previous comments would indicate. For example, the act authorizes the Minister of Finance to make payments to "eligible recipients." These are defined as "a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for gain or profit."

Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish said, "They are playing games with us." She said Mayor McCallion "is willing to take crumbs. I'm not."

The act also authorizes the Minister of Finance to make payments out of money appropriated by the Legislature to persons and entities whose activities are not for the purpose of gain or profit. This act also—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: You're quoting Carolyn Parrish?

Mr. Robert Bailey: "Where's the dollar? Where's the dollar?"

Anyways, the reality is that municipalities all across Ontario, all 480 of them, need consistent, secure, predictable funding, and they are not getting it through the body of this bill. What they need is for the government to recognize that the true load being borne by the municipalities is over $3.2 billion of downloaded costs.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Where did that start?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I knew you'd get to that.

The upload they have announced before 2011—Paul Martin, actually. He's the one that cut back funding to the provinces, right? By billions and billions of dollars. But that's a story they don't want to hear.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: David Peterson really started it all. Peterson did it.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yep.

The upload they have announced before 2011 amounts to only some $900 million. I want you to know that they need the whole $3.2 billion long before that.

I could go on at great length here. I wanted to read a couple of quotes I had here, if I could just lay my hands on them.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'll give you some of ours.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yeah, give me some of yours over there; I'll use those.

I was looking at a number of the press conferences here. I can't find it now; I'll just go extemporaneously.

I think what we need to do on this side of the House is—when we were talking to this issue, we tried to make plain that we don't like this time allocation issue, because we feel this bill is too important for that. We've tried to raise a number of different issues—the member for Niagara–Glanbrook raised a number of good issues; also the member for Hamilton Centre. A number of other members here today talked about this issue. When this bill comes to committee, we'll make amendments, put them forward, and hopefully the government of the day at that time will accept them.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased this evening to be able to speak in support of Bill 35. Bill 35 is actually a very simple bill. We've spent days debating it, and I do hope that we will get on with approving it quickly; hence the time allocation motion this evening.

The bill is really very simple. As people may know, when the province closes its books at the end of the year, on March 31, it takes a few months before all the calculations are done. Just like when I submit my income tax, the forms I need roll in through January and February, and it's April by the time we all submit; the province is much the same. The last payments get sorted out in the spring, and the final books are prepared for June or July. When we get to those final books, there is often a surplus, and we don't know way in advance how much that surplus going to be.

The current rules require that that surplus all go to paying down the debt. The public probably doesn't realize this, but Ontario actually has a per capita debt ratio that's lower than the federal government's debt ratio. Ontario actually has a very good debt ratio and we will continue to pay down the debt. Bill 35 in fact says that, that we will continue to put part of the surplus—but when there is a larger surplus, we also want to invest in Ontario and we want to invest in Ontario municipalities. There's been a lot of talk here tonight about slush funds. Quite frankly, I'm insulted that we would talk about investing in things like municipalities and possibly universities or other entities like that, as if it was a slush fund.

2040

I just want to quickly tell you the sorts of investments that we've been making lately. Both in my municipalities and yours, Speaker, because we actually share some of them, so the social housing that is shared by the Speaker

in the chair tonight, and myself: $1.29 million to repair the infrastructure for social housing.

Out of some of the end-of-year surplus that we already know about, we were able to provide $1.9 million for roads in Guelph. But, Speaker, in Wellington county, in your part of it, between the county and the individual municipalities, there was almost $7 million that went to roads and bridges. That was because, unlike what some of the previous speakers have implied, the allocation formula that we used there wasn't strictly per capita. In fact, what we did there, because it was targeted at roads and bridges, we looked at how many kilometres of road, how many bridges there were per individual, per population, and for those municipalities that had more roads for each individual, we gave them more money; hence, your area, which has a slightly lower population than mine, got way more money, because we understand that issue.

In Guelph, in my municipality, we were also able to have a very good announcement where we provided $5 million from the MIII infrastructure investment to the city of Guelph to repair the old Loretto convent and turn it into a new civic museum.

I am very offended that all of these investments, each and every one of which has an accountability agreement to go with it, would be considered by the opposition parties as slush funds. These are not slush funds. These are investments in Ontario infrastructure. I will be supporting this bill.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I've been listening to the debate, and I have a few comments to make on it. First, I have to say that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, earlier in the evening, held up Bill 35, and asked if this was a prop. He said, "No, it's not a prop; it's a bill."

But, really, when you read Bill 35, it is a prop. It's a prop or a crutch. It is nothing of substance. It hides the reality of Ontario. It has nothing to do with investing in Ontario. It has much more to do with investing in slush funds, investing in patronage, investing in things that are of no value for the people of Ontario.

I'd like to ask the Speaker for a little bit of an indulgence. I was listening, especially to the House leader earlier this evening, as he spoke introducing this debate for tonight. I've got a book here with a couple of little passages that I think are important and reflect and illustrate clearly what the government House leader was talking about. This little book is written by a fellow named Harry Frankfurt. He's a renowned moral philosopher and a professor of philosophy at Princeton University. And because I'm a little bit new at this, I'll ask for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker.

There's one quote where he says, "When we characterize talk as hot air, we mean that what comes out of the speaker's mouth is only that. It is mere vapor. His speech is empty, without substance or content. His use of language, accordingly, does not contribute to the purpose it purports to serve. No more information is communicated than if the speaker had merely exhaled. There are similarities between hot air and excrement...."

I thought that was really appropriate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would caution the member, just as I did one of the members previously, about the use of parliamentary language, and I ask him to respect that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. I'm not actually sure what is parliamentary language and what is not after today's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll remind the member that it's up to the Chair to make that decision, and the members have to respect that if they want to stay here.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I understand, Speaker, and that's why I asked for your indulgence to give me some guidance as I refer to quotes from books.

It's interesting. I guess I can't say what the title of this book is, but it's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Put it down.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Anyway, we have seen our people in Ontario, at ROMA, at Good Roads, requesting assistance from this government. There's a very significant need for assistance and help for our municipalities. Of course, this bill doesn't mention municipalities; it talks about entities, entities that operate without profit or gain, and as the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and others have said, the same criteria for cricket clubs and slush funds.

We have municipalities throughout this province, places like Merrickville that for years have been requesting assistance from this government for a sewage treatment plant; places like Lanark that has been requesting assistance with their water treatment plants, They get nothing from this Liberal government except stifling debate. Stifling debate is what we get.

When a municipality tries to pull in its belt a little bit to take advantage or to survive the hard times, like Ottawa did announcing a reduction, a cancellation of the crack pipe program, what do the McGuinty Liberals do? They just take a little bit more money and slush it over to their favourite programs.

This stifling of debate is not what the people of Ontario need. We need good, honest, thoughtful debate, and this is not unique or an exception, this debate that we're having here in the House. I saw the same thing last week in debate in this House, where we had a number of people on the government side engage in debate on bills that they had not even read. I learned a long time ago that you cannot debate with somebody who lacks knowledge. That is called ignorance, and this is what we are getting right now in this McGuinty Liberal government: an age of ignorance, no solid debate, and stifle when there are things to be talked about. They move on to their trivial, meaningless fluff bills. That's where they want to spend their time. They don't want to spend time on substantive discussion. They don't want to actually assist and help our municipalities. They just want to legalize, create legislation that they can change by order in council later on about who they will distribute the year-end slush to.

I'm disappointed that so many sensible, reasonable people on the other side of this House cannot see what

they are doing, that they drank the Kool-Aid and gulped it down, swallowed it without thought or interest, and they just blindly follow the lead, but there is no leadership. They just blindly go along.

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I think the seals are barking.

I really would like to see the Liberal government stand up. Stand up for the people of Ontario. Tell them that we want to debate, and you're going to do things that are good and valuable and sensible for the people of Ontario. Put the Kool-Aid down, and do what's right for the people of Ontario.

2050

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's a privilege to speak on this bill entitled Investing in Ontario.

Before beginning, I'd also like, perhaps on behalf of all members of this Legislature, to compliment the newly elected member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I cannot remember when a quotation that was brought forth by a member was an ornament to the member's own remarks in quite the way that it was today, and I would commend him for that.

As you'll know, this bill, if passed, would allow a portion of any unanticipated year-end provincial surpluses to address priority public needs, particularly municipal infrastructure projects, as well as reduce the accumulated deficit. All in all, I think this is part of prudent fiscal management. It also allows the government some wiggle room at the end of the year to allocate and resource and deploy what is, after all, a $90-billion budget. My honourable colleagues in my own party, opposite, said quite rightly that of course these are measures that any sensible government would do.

Since we took office in 2003, we've been able, through our prudent and measured fiscal approach, to substantially reduce the ratio of the provincial accumulated deficit to the gross domestic product, the type of measure or metric that, for example, bond rating agencies look to when they're rating, in terms of our bond issues, when we go to raise funds on the open market for the financial needs of the people of Ontario.

In 2003, the accumulated deficit was about 25% of the province's GDP. Since then, we've been able to balance the budget that, of course, we inherited from the previous government, which saddled this province and the people with a $5.6-billion accumulated provincial deficit. We have also, with this prudent, sensible management, been able to make those payments, despite the fact that Ontario's economy is facing a number of challenges, such as the weakening US economy, the high value of the Canadian dollar and increased costs for energy.

But paying down the accumulated deficit is far from being the only method to ensure a prosperous future, not only for our children and for Ontarians from all walks of life, but of course for the overall economy. It is critical for us, now more than ever, to take every opportunity available to us to invest in Ontario.

The McGuinty government understands that communities are engines of economic growth and hotbeds of innovation. For that reason, we are building on the progress that we've already made in working with municipalities, as well as making sure that, as I mentioned earlier, we have the opportunities to resource, to deploy the financial wherewithal in different corners, as was mentioned across the floor here, to different entities that may be in need.

The government has made historic investments in municipalities and municipal partnerships, often, by the way, without the support of the opposition parties, which I have to confess—for individuals who purport to support their municipalities up and down the corridors of Ontario—is really puzzling to us here on this side of the floor.

I'd like to remind members of this House what our government has accomplished in this new era of partnership with municipalities. There are a number of different issues to speak to.

For example, we've more than doubled our support to municipal operating budgets. In 2008, this will amount to $2.2 billion in ongoing operating support to municipalities. This is a stark contrast to the previous regimes that have been in power, who were all about downloading, fragmentation, amalgamation and basically eroding the municipal infrastructure as well as their capacity for financing their own internal needs.

The Ontario municipal partnership fund, something that we've resourced, assists municipalities with their social program costs, including equalization measures. It addresses challenges faced by northern and rural communities, and responds to policing costs in rural communities. In 2008, in the McGuinty Ontario, this fund will transfer $870 million—41% or $250 million more than the 2004 transfers under the previous program.

These are not mere numbers; these will have direct effects on the lived experience, on the day-to-day lives of the people of Ontario. For that reason, amongst many others in the remaining 12 pages of material that I have here, I'm very proud to speak in support of this bill. I thank you for this opportunity.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am rising to speak today about the Investing in Ontario Act that was introduced on March 18. This act will allow Ontario to continue on its road to responsible investment in the province's economy and its infrastructure

The bill approaches investment in a responsible and balanced way. With this bill, Ontario will be able to seize the opportunity to address two issues, municipal infrastructure and accumulated deficit, at the same time. This bill, if passed, would allow a portion of any unanticipated year-end provincial surpluses to both address priority public needs such as municipal infrastructure projects and reduce the accumulated deficit.

During this debate, members of the opposition and the third party have raised their own issues about this bill, but the fact of the matter is that currently, all year-end surpluses go towards debt reduction. Continuing that approach will not directly benefit the people, for example, in my riding of York South–Weston. My constituents welcome investments, but not at the cost of runaway

expenses and irresponsible deficits. A measured fiscal approach is an important value. Our government has reduced the ratio of the provincial accumulated deficit, but it's also a government that is talking, finally talking, once again to its municipal partners.

My riding of York South–Weston, as you know, is in Toronto and that means my constituents are part of a leading city internationally, a city that will serve as a seat of innovation while the province moves into a different kind of economy, a knowledge-based economy. Bill 35 addresses the fact that while the economy changes and while the province deals with the weakening US growth, the high value of the dollar and the high price of oil, while all this is happening, we in Ontario continue to take the opportunity to invest in municipalities. The Investing in Ontario Act, 2008, would help expand our economic advantage and build on our plan to strengthen the economy. The people of York South–Weston want to make sure that we are taking every opportunity available to us to invest in Ontario through investing in our municipalities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bryant has moved government notice of motion number 61.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2058 to 2108.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the table staff.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Qaadri, Shafiq
Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Ramal, Khalil
Arthurs, Wayne	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Mangat, Amrit	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Mauro, Bill	Sousa, Charles
Bryant, Michael	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Crozier, Bruce	Moridi, Reza	
Dickson, Joe	Pupatello, Sandra	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the table staff.

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Murdoch, Bill
Barrett, Toby	Miller, Norm	Tabuns, Peter
Hillier, Randy	Miller, Paul	Wilson, Jim

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 28; the nays are 9.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 2110.

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Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
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Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton–Springdale	
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Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
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Miller, Paul (ND)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	
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Leeanna Pendergast, Michael Prue, Charles Sousa
Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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Robert Bailey, Jim Brownell, Linda Jeffrey,
Kuldip Kular, Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro,
Carol Mitchell, David Orazietti, Joyce Savoline
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Michael Brown, Kevin Flynn, France Gélinas,
Randy Hillier, Lisa MacLeod, Julia Munro,
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals, Maria Van Bommel
Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

Justice Policy / Justice

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos,
Jeff Leal, Reza Moridi, Yasir Naqvi,
Lou Rinaldi, John Yakabuski, David Zimmer
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon, Bob Delaney,
Joe Dickson, Kevin Flynn, Sylvia Jones,
Norm Miller, Mario Sergio, Peter Tabuns
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

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Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel, David Zimmer
Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle, Kim Craitor,
Gerry Martiniuk, Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch,
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht, Mario Sergio
Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przezdziecki

Social Policy / Politique sociale

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Vic Dhillon
Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo,
Helena Jaczek, Dave Levac, Shafiq Qaadri,
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott, Peter Shurman
Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 23 April 2008

Mercredi 23 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 23 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 23 avril 2008

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Remember those job losses we've been talking about in manufacturing—194,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs leaving Ontario since 2006? For the first time in 30 years, Ontario's unemployment rate is higher than the national average, and the startling news is that Ontario is straddling the line of have-not status. That is the legacy of the Liberal government and their high taxes and big spending.

The latest casualty of this tax-and-spend policy is Dell. Eleven hundred Dell employees in Ottawa got pink slips today. That's 1,100 parents, recent graduates and residents of the city of Ottawa who will be jobless in three months. I need to know, and so do my constituents, what this Liberal government's plan is for the people who go home tonight to their spouses and their children and face the reality that there will not be a paycheque to pay the mortgage, the groceries or the university bill.

The Liberals need to wake up. We are now in Dalton McGuinty's recession. The economy is not as rosy as the Liberals would have us believe. They won't take these job losses as proof. Will they take yesterday's Bensimon Byrne announcement that it is indeed slowing as proof? Mr. McGuinty's high taxes, his big spending and his lack of focus have caused residents in my community, and his, to lose jobs today.

Will he own up to his poor financial planning and deliver a real economic stimulus package so the workers at Dell and so many across Ontario who have lost their jobs won't face more months of uncertainty on the unemployment line?

BLENHEIM AND DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Pat Hoy: Tomorrow night, the Blenheim and District Chamber of Commerce will be holding their annual awards dinner to honour four individuals for their outstanding contributions.

Shannon and Bryan Prince have been named citizens of the year. Shannon is the curator of the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum. She is involved in joint Underground Railroad projects with York University, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati and with Millersville University and several historical organizations in Pennsylvania.

Her husband, Bryan, a descendant of slaves who came to Canada prior to the American Civil War, is a historian and author. He has lectured extensively in many parts of Canada and the United States on black history and is active in numerous local organizations.

Stan Uher is being honoured as entrepreneur of the year. Since 1989, Stan has owned and operated a classic car restoration shop in Blenheim. He has restored several pre-war funeral coaches and fire trucks and is currently completing restoration of a 110-year-old Chatham-built Gray-Dort for the Chatham-Kent Museum.

Dennis Guy is the agriculturalist of the year. He is a renowned radio broadcaster, including 15 years with the Ontario farm network, providing comprehensive farm and marketing news. I am pleased to recognize these four leaders for their contribution to the social and economic prosperity of Chatham–Kent.

TELUS CUP

Mr. John Yakabuski: Last Monday evening I had the honour of participating in the opening ceremonies for the Telus cup in Arnprior. The Telus cup, as you know, is the national championship of AAA midget hockey. Over its 30-year history, it has hosted over 180 future NHLers such as Joe Sakic, Daniel Briere, Dany Heatley and Sidney Crosby. No doubt some of the players competing this week will also be NHL stars of tomorrow.

I must tell you how proud we are to be hosting the Telus cup in the beautiful town of Arnprior, where the mighty Madawaska meets the majestic Ottawa. I want to take this opportunity to thank the town of Arnprior for their support of this prestigious event, and event chair Glenn Arthur and his committee, as well as the over 200 volunteers, giving of their time and efforts. Congratulations and thank you. You've done a tremendous job. Without those who give so much of themselves, events such as this one just don't happen.

Our gratitude goes out to title sponsor Telus and the many local businesses and organizations whose generosity and support are so very important. As I was speaking with Glenn earlier today, he mentioned that he was overwhelmed by the support of the people of Arnprior and area.

Congratulations and best of luck to all the players and coaches. You're already champions. A special thank you to the parents. Without the commitment and dedication you give your children, their participation would not be possible. I urge each and every member of this assembly and all the people of Ontario to tune in to TSN or RDS this Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock, and you will see the best midget hockey in the world.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I recently heard a quote by John Ralston Saul referring to the importance of our public education system. He said: "We need more than ever to look at the public education system as the primary tool we have to ensure that children are able to grow up to become citizens."

I know this sums up this government's approach to our public education system quite nicely. We must ensure that our children, and in my case my grandchildren, have what they need to succeed in their education and in life.

With this in mind, I'm pleased that the Windsor–Essex Catholic District School Board in my riding now receives $42 million more than it did in 2003, despite a decline in the number of students. Further, the Greater Essex County District School Board in my riding now receives over $63 million more than it did in 2003, despite a decline in the number of students.

These enrolment declines are a fact of life for most school boards and are projected to continue for the next few years. A major factor for the decline is simply changing demography. Despite this, the McGuinty government continues to invest more in our publicly funded education system so that boards can change their operations, if necessary, but also to ensure that students have better support. This is the right approach to take, and we'll continue to take it to ensure success for the children of our province.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The McGuinty Liberals are once again bullying the opposition and not listening to experts like the children's aid society. In the social policy committee yesterday afternoon, during clause-by-clause of Bill 12, the Access to Adoption Records Act, my colleague Norm Sterling, the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, tabled several excellent amendments that were defeated by Liberal members.

It was obvious that by stonewalling the Progressive Conservative amendments, the Liberal members of the committee were following orders. The amendments were to ensure that children who were abused, removed from their family and subsequently adopted could be automatically protected from having their personal information disclosed to the abuser without their consent.

These amendments were defeated by London–Fanshawe Liberal Khalil Ramal; the Liberal member from Guelph, Liz Sandals; Oak Ridges–Markham, Helena Jaczek; and Brampton–West, Vic Dhillon. The member from York South–Weston, Laura Albanese, was present for the debate on the bill, then left the committee room moments before the vote on our amendments, and returned following the vote. Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

Bill 12 is supposed to be a fix-it bill needed by the Liberal government because they didn't get it right the first time and were taken to court. Our PC amendments were in your original bill, but for some reason known only to the uncaring Liberal government, victims of abuse will no longer have the protection they deserve from the abusers.

1340

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: This week is Earth Week. It is a great opportunity for everyone in this chamber, as well as across Ontario, to think about how important the health of our planet is to the future as well as to our children.

But for the McGuinty government, we don't think about the environment on one day of the year; we realize that thinking green is something that must become second nature to all of us. The environment must be a significant consideration in all that we do.

This is certainly the case when you look at Metrolinx, which is bringing together 12 transit systems in the development of a regional transit plan for the GTA, extending from the east in Durham region to Hamilton.

In this year's budget, this government announced its commitment to provide funding for the first two lists of recommended projects by Metrolinx, for a total funding of almost $800 million. These projects will undoubtedly lead to reduced traffic congestion, reduced smog and greenhouse gases, and cleaner air to breathe.

Metrolinx makes up one third of this government's vision of sustainable growth and prosperity for the greater Toronto region and Durham and Hamilton. The other two components are made up of the greenbelt and the Places to Grow plan. Together, these three important initiatives truly signify how important the health of the environment is to this government and how we aim to think green every day of the year.

CIBC LABOUR DISPUTE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I rise today in solidarity with the 62 CIBC employees, mostly women, who have been on strike in Sudbury for over 14 weeks.

The workers have called for a modest wage increase. These women presently make $13 an hour. The two sides are 50 cents apart; 3.8%. CIBC says they can't afford the workers' demands. Yet, in 2007, the bank made $3.3 billion in profit and gave their shareholders 25% increases. We know where CIBC's priorities stand. The NDP believes that Sudbury's working families should be their priority.

Let's put the 50 cents in perspective. In 2006, the CEO of CIBC made over $9.4 million for his salary. That's $4,500 an hour. It would take a striking worker 10 weeks of full-time work to make what the CEO makes in a single hour. The previous CEO retired with a pay package of $52 million. That's more than those 62 striking workers will make in their lifetime.

Linda Denton, a CIBC employee for 22 years, says: "I never believed it would go on this long, but CIBC has proven their arrogance. They just won't talk to us. They're trying to break the union, break the women."

I urge CIBC to sit down with the Steelworkers. It is time to treat these women fairly.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I rise today to speak about our government's move to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals by banning the sale and cosmetic use of pesticides.

This legislation, if passed, would make Ontario's pesticide rules among the toughest in North America, and more importantly, it would replace a patchwork of municipal bylaws across Ontario. Under the stewardship of the Premier and the Minister of Environment, and with the support of organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society and the Ontario College of Family Physicians, our ban builds on the leadership shown by those municipalities that introduced bans or imposed restrictions on cosmetic pesticides over the past several years.

In my own riding of Ottawa Centre, I was pleased when in 2002 the city of Ottawa council adopted a three-year pesticide reduction strategy to encourage all community members to voluntarily reduce the use of cosmetic pesticides on private property. Although the city of Ottawa has not banned the cosmetic use of pesticides, the community has actively been working to promote a healthier, greener and safer city for everyone to live.

Yesterday alone I received numerous e-mails from constituents who expressed their support for this proposed legislation. Many constituents in my riding pointed out that the long-term health of their families far outweighs any challenges they may face in maintaining their lawns and gardens.

As we celebrate Earth Week, I want to encourage all community members in Ottawa Centre and beyond to visit the environmental registry and comment on the proposed legislation.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Mike Colle: It being Earth Week, I would like to comment on how important it is for our government to continue to invest in public transit in Toronto and the greater Toronto area. I am pleased to join my colleague from Ajax–Pickering in supporting improved transit in Durham and area also.

It certainly underscores the importance of what our government is doing in transit. This year alone, we have committed $393 million to transit funding in the city of Toronto, and $2.7 billion to help the city of Toronto improve and expand transit. We also give over $314 million every year out of our gas tax to municipalities for public transit.

In the Move Ontario 2020 program, for the first time in the history of a project of that nature, which is over $17 billion, our government will pay 100% of the capital cost of building the subways and light rail transit systems across the GTA, including the rebuilding of the Eglinton crosstown light rail transit, which the previous Harris government in 1997 ripped out of the ground when the subway was already under way in my riding. Mr. Harris ripped it out of the ground. We are now going to put it back, provide jobs, clean the air and do something about gridlock, after Mr. Harris ripped the subway out of the ground in 1997.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr7, An Act to revive 827291 Ontario Ltd.

Bill Pr8, An Act to revive 719226 Ontario Limited.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 12, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act in relation to adoption information and to make consequential amendments to the Child and Family Services Act / Projet de loi 12, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil en ce qui a trait aux renseignements sur les adoptions et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1348 to 1353.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Orazietti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Gélinas, France	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bentley, Christopher	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Best, Margarett	Hampton, Howard	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Horwath, Andrea	Pupatello, Sandra
Brown, Michael A.	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Jaczek, Helena	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Kormos, Peter	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Mangat, Amrit	Sorbara, Greg
Craitor, Kim	Marchese, Rosario	Sousa, Charles
Crozier, Bruce	Matthews, Deborah	Tabuns, Peter
Delaney, Bob	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	Miller, Paul	Watson, Jim
DiNovo, Cheri	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Martiniuk, Gerry	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 60; the nays are 17.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the report carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I move that the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act, 2008, be read for the first time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As required, we need to have a bill introduced in both languages. I would just ask that the honourable member introduce the bill tomorrow.

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (CERTIFICATION), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (ACCRÉDITATION)

Mr. Hampton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to certification of trade unions / Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail en ce qui a trait à l'accréditation des syndicats.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995, to allow the Ontario Labour Relations Board to certify a trade union as the bargaining agent of the employees in a bargaining unit without directing a representation vote if it is satisfied that more than 55% of the employees in the bargaining unit are members of the trade union on the date on which the application is made.

Under the present act, a representation vote is required and those—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), that the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 23, 2008, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1401 to 1406.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Orazietti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Duncan, Dwight	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Best, Margarett	Gravelle, Michael	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Ramsay, David
Brown, Michael A.	Jaczek, Helena	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Sergio, Mario
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Mangat, Amrit	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Craitor, Kim	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John

Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Chudleigh, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Gélinas, France	Martiniuk, Gerry	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Miller, Paul	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 54; the nays are 26.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member for Dufferin–Caledon, I would like to welcome today the grandparents of page Rheanna Kendrick: Nancy McArthur, Tom Needham, Mary and Ron Kendrick.

On behalf of the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, family members of page Laura Shum: Eric Shum, King Shum, Sui Lin Shum.

On behalf of the member of Don Valley East: Mr. Andrew's grade 4 class from La Citadelle.

On behalf of the leader of the third party, we welcome the Chiefs of Ontario today: Angus Toulouse, John Beaucage, Stan Beardy, Arnold Gardner, Denise Stonefish, Chris McCormick, Glen Hare and Mike Morris.

On behalf of the member from Durham, friends of page Michael Louws: Peter Vogel and Abegail Vogel.

Welcome, as well, on behalf of page Georgia LaMarre, to her grandmother, Gail Hawks, and her mother, Tracy LaMarre.

On behalf of page Prakash Pandya: Yogini Pandya, Kamlesh Pandya and Tejas Pandya.

As well, we would like to welcome members from OECTA as guests of the member from Kitchener–Conestoga: Warren Grafton, Mike Devoy, Patrick Etmanski, Ken Hambleton, John Payne, Judy Perkes and James McCormack.

On behalf of the member for Nipissing and the member for St. Paul's: again, Chief John Beaucage, Bob Goulais, Monica Lister and Patricia Campeau.

On behalf of the members, I take this opportunity to recognize the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane on his 60th birthday today. Happy birthday.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Yesterday, following the oral question period, I committed to review the Hansard of proceedings both in response to a point of order from the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington and due to my own concerns about the general tenor of parts of yesterday's question period. I have now done so, and I want to address the House on the issue of the tone and language that characterized a portion of yesterday's proceedings. I'm going to do so in the broad context of standing order 23, a rule that was brought up a number of times yesterday and seemed to enjoy a degree of currency it does not usually have.

Like I am doing now, Speakers before me on numerous occasions have addressed the House concerning parliamentary language, civility in debate and mutual respect among members. Most of the time we do a pretty good job on those accounts, but there are occasions when the issues of the day do seem to provoke the House into a state that sometimes results in language being used that, in retrospect, most members would not have used or would regret having used. Yesterday, unfortunately, was one of those days.

Standing order 23 serves in a very general sense as a guideline for what is broadly acceptable speech and behaviour in this House. One might summarize its underlying philosophy in the following terms: Temperance is the hallmark of good debate. Despite the heat of the moment and occasionally flared tempers, we all have a responsibility to be mindful of this. As Speaker, I will be more vigilant and proactive on this account.

The other day I asked the House also to be mindful of the people who come to the assembly to watch our proceedings in person or who watch the TV broadcast of the Legislative Assembly. Those people also deserve our respect and are entitled to expect that the public business of the province be conducted in a civil environment where different points of view are tolerated and considered.

Standing order 23 tells us how to accomplish this, and I'm pleased that so many members had reference to it yesterday. The use of intemperate language, the making of allegations, suggesting untoward motives and generally participating in a way that causes disorder in the House are all demeaning to the institution and all of us who serve here at the will of our constituents.

As I and my predecessors have done so many times before, I again implore all members to appreciate the great privilege we have of being members of this House and to work toward making this place the best it can be, even at its most contentious times.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ELIZABETH BAIN

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier. As you know, there remain a significant number of unanswered questions surrounding the crown's decision not to call witnesses or present evidence in the Robert Baltovich murder trial. And today we learned that last fall, the crown offered Mr. Baltovich a deal of one day in jail if he would tell them where Elizabeth Bain's body was.

Premier, do you have any concerns about how the crown handled this, at first plea-bargaining a murder charge down to one day in jail, and then throwing in the towel at the start of the trial?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will refer this to the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, remembering that this is a tragedy for the Bain family, who, years ago, lost their very young daughter. For Mr. Baltovich, after a process over an extended period of time, he has been found not guilty, and we hope he will be able to get on with his life.

This was a process that started with a trial and went through an appeal at which a new trial was ordered. That new trial proceeded. As a result of certain evidentiary rulings made by the presiding trial judge because of changes in the law, evidence was not available to the crown. The crown did what was in the interests of justice and of the highest professional standards, and advised the court of that fact as quickly as possible, and the jury rendered the only verdict that could be rendered, which was the finding of not guilty.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I didn't hear any concerns there about plea bargaining and a one-day sentence with an alleged murderer.

Yesterday, in defending the crown's decision to pull the plug on the prosecution, the Attorney General said it was "justified because of evidentiary rules based on changes in the law." We've looked at those rulings—made two months ago, by the way. It's difficult to see where they justify collapsing the prosecution.

I ask the Attorney General today to be more specific in explaining why the crown proceeded in the way it did.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I simply say this: that the crowns who were prosecuting this case have done so very diligently throughout a long process. They concluded, on the basis of the evidentiary rulings, that at the end of the day, the evidence that was available for introduction was not such as to justify further prosecution.

It is the duty and obligation of the crown to advise the court of that fact as soon as possible and to ensure that the court is apprised of that fact. The court did what needed to be done, and the verdict rendered by the jury was the only one available.

I would say that it does not serve any purpose to engage in a line-by-line analysis of who did or did not say things over the years this case has taken.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suspect the Bain family might have a different perspective on that.

Earlier today, when the Premier was asked on a call-in radio show about a public inquiry into the situation, he said, "It's a very legitimate request." I would suggest it's more than legitimate; it's absolutely necessary. The crown has acted in a bizarre manner here: the plea-bargain deal; the collapse of prosecution two months after court rulings and after a jury had been empanelled; they're signing on to an agreed statement of fact that Paul Bernardo shouldn't be called as a witness; and on and on.

Mr. Baltovich now wants a public inquiry. Your Premier believes it's a legitimate request. Elizabeth Bain's family and friends want answers, and the public has a right to know.

Minister, will you do the right thing and call a public inquiry?

1420

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Not surprisingly, the Premier did not dismiss out of hand without further information a very legitimate and serious request in a tragic case. Before providing my advice to the Premier—I provided my initial impression yesterday—I want to say to the Bain family and to Mr. Baltovich that I am going to take the necessary time to thoroughly consider all aspects of the request and suggestion to determine whether a further review or inquiry would offer anything further than this public process already has to strengthen the administration of justice. Then I will be providing my advice to the Premier on this matter.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I want to talk to you about a mum I talked to this morning who is an adoptive parent of a child who is a ward of the children's aid society. The child—I will call her Joanna—is 12 years old. She was abused badly by her parents, violently, before she was the age of four. Her mum works with her every day to overcome the post-traumatic stress disorder which she now suffers from. Her mum tells me that her chronological age may be 14, but her emotional age is probably about five or six years younger.

Why, Madam Minister, are you not going to protect people like Joanna from their abusive parents finding out their adoptive name when they turn the age of 19?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this question belongs to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I wanted to say to the honourable member on the other side that our government is concerned, but we believe that this bill strikes an appropriate balance between the privacy and the protection. There are indeed existing mechanisms in our new legislation that address the concerns raised by the member. For example, our new adoption bill allows for all adopted adults to register a no-contact notice or a notice of contact preference. Under the proposed legislation, there is a $50,000 fine for an individual who breaches a no-contact notice.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I am told by workers at the children's aid society that many of these abusive parents are habitual drug users. There is much mental illness with regard to these people. With all due respect, I don't think a no-contact order will have any effect on their ability to contact or wanting to contact their child.

I understand that there is an abuser in this situation and there is a victim. Why are you on the side of the abuser?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, I think that our bill strikes a very appropriate balance. By the way, we've spoken to the privacy commissioner about our bill and she is on board with us. She is very supportive of it.

It's also important to note that provinces like British Columbia, Alberta and Newfoundland have adopted the same legislation with a no-contact provision in the act, and they all report that the no-contact notice has been a successful solution to any concern regarding the protective measures, and that this no-contact provision in the act has been respected and they are very satisfied with it.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: The Gatehouse child abuse investigation and support site here in Toronto doesn't agree with you. They understand these victims and their fears, and program director Angela Gallant told me that allowing abuser information about the victim risks revictimization and retraumatization. The victim must have the power to direct any contact themselves; otherwise, these victims will have to take steps like changing their name or leaving the country. She suggested that all legislation must be victim-centred. The victim must have the power to decide when they ever have any contact with their abuser. It shouldn't be the abuser who is making this decision.

Madam Minister, you also have not included any provision in Bill 12 with regard to multiple adoptions. When one sibling becomes 19, they may have younger brothers and sisters who may be affected by the information of the adoptive name.

Why won't you change this bill? Why would—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand the concern of the member in the opposite party. Prior to entering into politics, I was a nurse working in the delivery room. I saw a lot of these young mothers giving their babies away. But no one gave their baby away without having the dream that one day they will be reunited with their baby.

So I want to say to the member of the opposite party that we have looked at his concerns, we have talked to our stakeholders, we have talked to the privacy commissioner, and they are on board with us. There are enough provisions, and also other measures in other legislation—other protective measures within the law—that are available to those who want to continue to be protected. I think that we have struck the right balance.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, Platinex Inc. announced that under the Ontario Mining Act, it has staked an additional 72,000 acres of crown land adjacent to Webequie First Nation, Marten Falls First Nation, Eabametoong First Nation, Neskantaga First Nation and Gull Bay First Nation.

The Premier will know that Platinex is the mining exploration company which sued Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation for $10 billion and played a role in the jailing of the Kitchenuhmaykoosib First Nation leadership.

My question: Why weren't the First Nations I mentioned consulted and accommodated by the McGuinty government before Platinex was allowed to register these new mining claims?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I do want to address elements of the member's question. I want to start, Speaker, by acknowledging, as you have, Grand Chief Angus Toulouse, regional chief for Ontario, and grand chiefs as well as chiefs from across the province and supporters of KI Chief Donny Morris and council.

There is obviously a particular culpability that rests with the government of the day when it comes to injustices endured, and sometimes conquered, by First Nations. I would say that while there are no elected angels here, I am certainly accountable for the state of affairs, and I will say that we have worked and we will continue to work to see that chief and council are released from prison so that we can get on with finding a way to have chief and council and the entire KI community come to a resolution of this matter.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Forgive me, but I didn't hear an answer to the question. What First Nations want to know, particularly the additional First Nations who now find they will have to deal with Platinex, is: Did the McGuinty government fulfill its constitutional duty to consult and accommodate First Nations' interests before Platinex was allowed to register these new mining claims?

I know why there was no answer. There was no answer because the McGuinty government failed again to do its constitutional duty to consult and accommodate First Nations.

But my next question is this: Has the minister notified the affected First Nations that their traditional lands have been staked and are now, under the Ontario Mining Act, wide open for mining exploration by Platinex?

1430

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm going to answer the member's question. I will say, however, that at some point the specificity may require me to refer it to the Minister of Mines. For now I will say this: The Premier has already said that a change to the Mining Act is absolutely necessary. It is the case that the Ontario Superior Court found that the government of Ontario had in fact met its consultation requirements. But it is my view and it is this government's view that the minimum constitutional requirements as a government and as a policy are simply just that—a minimum. The goal in every case has got to be to try and facilitate an agreement: an agreement so as to recognize the self-determination of First Nations; an agreement so as to recognize the necessity of, in this case, the economic opportunity for a First Nation; but at the end of the day, to try and achieve an agreement. Yes, we will pursue the constitutional minimums, of course. But the goal is to get an agreement.

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is bizarre. First Nation leaders are in jail, the mining company which is at the centre of this has 72,000 additional acres of mining rights now, equivalent to more than half the area of the city of Toronto, and the McGuinty government seems to think that all you have to do is get an agreement.

There are rights and interests here. I did not hear an answer to the second question: Have First Nations been notified? In fact, no, they haven't, because on that issue again, the McGuinty government is missing in action.

So I ask this question: With First Nation leaders in jail simply because they tried to stand up and defend their aboriginal rights, with the mining company getting more mining exploration rights, can the McGuinty government tell us why they continue to put mining interests ahead of First Nation interests in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I know that there are many First Nations leaders, chiefs, and individual supporters of First Nations and non-aboriginal descent who are here in support of the KI chief and council. We opposed the incarceration of the KI chief and council. With respect to their release from prison, as soon as the appeal was filed, which could only be filed by the parties, the Attorney General filed a motion to expedite the appeal and has already indicated that the crown will be taking the position of supporting the appeal so that they can be released. We are taking steps to see that they are released. We did oppose their incarceration. I personally made every effort to try and facilitate a resolution, however imperfectly, that would have avoided that incarceration, and I will continue to make these efforts to try and resolve the situation.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier again: The leadership of KI beg to differ with the minister about the positions that the government of Ontario, the McGuinty government, has taken with respect to the incarceration of the leadership. The question I have for the Premier is: Today First Nations leaders, environmentalists and concerned Ontario citizens gathered here at Queen's Park to voice their anger at the McGuinty government's failure to properly consult and accommodate the rights and interests of First Nations—in this case, the KI First Nation and Ardoch Algonquin First Nation—regarding mineral exploration on their traditional lands. My question is this: Why hasn't the McGuinty government issued a stop order and removed the lands in question from mineral exploration and begun the consultation that you failed to do in the first place?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think I owe to the leadership present and the people who have gathered on the front lawn some response before I refer further questions to my colleague. Let me just say this to those present and those who have a direct interest in this: We have inherited here in this province an imperfect history when it comes to the relationship between government and our First Nations and our aboriginal communities. We have assumed responsibility hitherto not fully assumed and certainly not as earnestly as we have. We have established a separate ministry; I have a new minister in place. We have established some wins, I would argue, in terms of dealing with the aftermath of the Ipperwash tragedy. We have arrived at a new conclusion to our gaming agreement. We've also inherited an imperfect system when it comes to how mining claims are dealt with in Ontario. We have to address that, but I don't want the leadership to doubt for one instant our determination to find a better way.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, there's one problem with everything you say: These issues didn't crop up overnight. You've been the government now for almost five years, and for over five years people like myself and the member for Timmins–James Bay have been raising these issues. The McGuinty government has made announcement after announcement, but you've failed to act. Yesterday, on Earth Day, you would have received a letter from many prominent Canadians—Margaret Atwood, Sarah Harmer, Cathy Jones, Stephen Lewis, among others—and the letter states: "We do not believe that mining should supersede the rights of people to protect their homes and their health."

Premier, why has the McGuinty government failed to listen to those people? Why have you failed to listen to First Nation leaders who've asked you over and over again to make these changes? Why do we continue to see mining exploration companies getting more rights and more privileges, while First Nation leaders are in jail?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The discussion with respect to Mining Act changes is one that I have had with the Ipperwash commission implementation committee, which included and was asked for by grand chiefs, and we talked about exactly that. We talked about exactly how that consultation would take place. I indicated on behalf of the government that in fact the discussion would not be the usual one whereby the government gives, historically, over the past 100 years plus—the First Nations leader would be lucky to receive a heads-up as to what the government's intentions were. Instead, our approach is to collaborate from the beginning of this process to ensure that First Nations leadership is very much a part of how we make these changes. We've made that commitment and we're working together to achieve just that.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again there is a glaring problem with what the minister said. You showed up in Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug with a document that you had drafted; you put it down on the table and you basically said to the leadership of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, "Sign here." There was no consultation. Chief Donny Morris is very clear: It was unilateral. "Sign here and there shall be mining exploration in your traditional territory." Now, both KI First Nation and Ardoch First Nation have asked the McGuinty government to establish a joint panel to deal with the issue of mineral

exploration and mineral development on their traditional lands. The letter to the Premier yesterday, from Margaret Atwood and others, requests the same joint panel.

Can the Premier tell us: Why has the McGuinty government refused to establish the joint panel requested by the First Nations?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Firstly, the member is mistaken if he suggests that in my first visit up there with Grand Chief Beardy I put any document on the table. On the contrary: I received a proposal from the KI chief and council and I listened, and at the end of that I suggested that we could find agreement, I knew, on a number of points.

Secondly, with respect to a joint panel and entering into consultations, I just said that that's exactly what we're doing right now. I want to be very clear: This government is engaged in consultation with First Nations leadership when it comes to changes to the Mining Act. Secondly, all efforts were made first to listen and then to try and come to an agreement with Chief Morris and council. That's why he said on May 5 that he appreciated the government's efforts and the three times that I went up there, and the countless phone calls and letters that were exchanged—imperfectly, I recognize. However, we have tried and will continue to try to achieve a resolution.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Attorney General. Yesterday, as you know, the Liberal members of the social policy committee voted against our amendment to the Access to Adoption Records Act, which would have allowed a disclosure veto to victims of child abuse who are removed from their parents by the children's aid society and later adopted. This means that children who have been sexually or physically assaulted, even tortured, by their parent can do nothing to prevent that parent from—to quote the children's aid society, "To learn their names at age 19 and track them down." This is despite the fact that one of the fundamental principles of the Victims' Bill of Rights of your ministry—and surely these young people are victims—states that, "Victims should be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect for their personal dignity and privacy by justice system officials."

1440

Minister, why won't your government afford the same rights of privacy to these young people that you have afforded to other victims of crime in the Victims' Bill of Rights?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The Minister of Community and Social Services, please.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, it's a very difficult bill and it was a very difficult discussion. We have consulted with a lot of our stakeholders. We have consulted with other provinces. British Columbia, Alberta and Newfoundland have this provision in their act. Because of the no-contact notice and the fine attached to it—and you have to remember, those are not children; they are 19 years old and over. So they are now adults and they are able to make their own decisions. We are told by these other provinces that the no-contact notice has been a successful solution to any concerns regarding protective measures.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, I would like to address my question to the Attorney General because I believe this is something within his bailiwick and something I would respectfully ask him to look into.

The rights to privacy protected within the justice system by the Victims' Bill of Rights are there, but there's no right to protection within the adoption system. Why are you allowing this incredible inconsistency between these two situations when you're dealing with victims of crime in both instances, especially given the vulnerability of these people, whose vulnerability continues past age 19?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, we're dealing here with adults. We have a no-contact provision in the act, and there is a $50,000 fine attached to it.

We have just got the e-mail from the privacy commissioner, and she is fully in support of Bill 12 as it currently reads. Also, in addition to the measures that are contained in the proposed legislation, there are other protective measures within the law that may be available should adults feel they are at risk of harm, like for instance a restraining order pursuant to the Criminal Code. Again, three provinces have this disclosure veto in their act, and it has been respected because of the fine and the no-contact provision in the act. So we are following what other provinces have done.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. The Chiefs of Ontario are in Toronto this week for their planning sessions on health care. Grand Chief Stan Beardy is here right now. He is urging the government to invest in the existing aboriginal health access centre and to fund a new aboriginal health access centre. Why won't the Premier agree?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll refer this to the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: I thank my honourable friend for the question and welcome those chiefs and others who are here in the Legislature today.

I had a fantastic opportunity just a few weeks ago in Thunder Bay to meet with Grand Chief Beardy and many others when we announced that the Menoyawin Health Centre in Sioux Lookout, a $100-million hospital project, is moving forward to the stage for tendering, getting very close to this substantial new investment.

I indicated in a speech that followed that certainly in the Ministry of Health's budget, in partnership with other government ministries that participate in the AWHS strategy, as an example, there are additional investments available to keep pace with some of the challenges that are being experienced by First Nations communities. Over the course of the year, in concert with the Minister

of Aboriginal Affairs and other government ministers, we anticipate being in a situation to further enhance the quality and access to health care services enjoyed by First Nations populations in Ontario.

M^me^ France Gélinas: My question was specifically about aboriginal health access centres. AOHC, the Association of Ontario Health Centres, has also asked the government to eliminate what they call the second-class status of aboriginal health access centres and the community they serve. According to AOHC, the funding for aboriginal health access centres has been flatlined since 1997, limiting their ability to reach tens of thousands of aboriginal Ontarians in need of care and support. Why won't the minister agree to eliminate the second-class status of First Nations communities by investing in existing aboriginal health access centres and funding new aboriginal health access centres?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member knows very, very well about our government's investments in expanding the community health centre model in the province of Ontario, and we are in the midst of doubling those. On the particular matter where the member speaks about flatlining and this two-tier status, I don't think that the story is quite as clear as that. Certainly when we funded pay increases for nurse practitioners, we sought to do that across all the models of primary care where they are involved. But I will take a good hard look at the situation raised by the association of community health centres and by the honourable member, and I will endeavour to get back to the member and see if there are adjustments that are necessary to make sure that the investments in the aboriginal health centres are taking place at par with those investments that we've been making in community health centres.

I just want to remind the honourable member, as she knows and I've had a chance to say in the presence of the community health centre community, that while we are very committed to building those which we have announced, it's not our government's intention at present to be adding more community health centres beyond the 28 which have been announced but are not yet fully operational.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Minister, our government recognizes that we as a society have a responsibility to the environment and to future generations. We realize that natural resources are limited, and as such, we have dedicated ourselves to a wide variety of innovative energy initiatives. The Premier has often stated that there are incredible opportunities to be had as we move towards green technology and renewable energy production. Already we see companies across Ontario revolutionizing the way our society produces the energy we rely on in our daily lives.

Verdant Power, in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, is one of those companies creating revolutionary solutions. They are taking the idea behind a wind turbine and combining it with the reliability of constant flow of our rivers by placing the turbines underwater. This is an important project for my riding and Ontario. What is the Ministry of Research and Innovation doing to help make this innovative idea a reality?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to tell the House that the world is seeking new forms of renewable energy. We have to wean ourselves away from using dirty fossilized carbon. We know the traditional ones that have been accepted: solar and wind and biomass, all of which have challenges. But there's an innovative company called Verdant, and they have a demonstration project in the fine city of Cornwall. I tell people that the wind does not always blow but the river always flows, and as a result, they have come up with this new free-flow turbine technology which is actually like trying to put a windmill in the river, underneath, and of course the current makes the turbine turn, and the turbine always turns. Unlike wind power, the turbine is always turning and producing this wonderful form of electricity. I've invested, through our ministry, some $2.2 million through our innovation demonstration fund to prove this technology.

Mr. Jim Brownell: It was a great day indeed when you came to my riding and we together made that announcement at St. Lawrence College overlooking the mighty St. Lawrence. This technology has obvious implications for harnessing the power of the abundant rivers in the province of Ontario. This project is an example of what we can achieve through the commitments of our communities to make a greener Ontario while at the same time bringing innovative ideas to the global market. The St. Lawrence River has been a major contributor of life in my riding for hundreds of years. Thanks to some visionary thinking and timeless Ontario ingenuity, it is now also a source of clean, responsible energy. With initiatives such as these, our province can capture a leading share of the international market for clean energy production.

Can the minister outline the benefits for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and the global ramifications of the Verdant Power project?

1450

Hon. John Wilkinson: I think the world can beat a path to the door of Cornwall. I can see that the world, looking for renewable sources of energy, will want to look at this new form of renewable energy that they can tap into.

The demonstration project that we have funded will be for 15 megawatts. It will power some 11,000 homes. It's wonderful in Cornwall, because they have the mighty St. Lawrence there, and they also have the connection to the grid because of the hydroelectric power that's already there.

I was particularly pleased, because of the leadership of the member, that St. Lawrence College is one of the partners here. We're going to have to educate a whole new generation of skilled workers who will be able to take the job opportunities that are present from the new

forms of renewable energy that the world, I say, is demanding of us in the 21st century. I would say to the young people of Ontario that Ontario is a jurisdiction that embraces the vision of Earth Day. I'm so proud to be part of a government, and to be with the member, in driving new jobs into Ontario.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. The Bank of Canada slashed its main rate again today, about 50 basis points, and warned that serious economic slowdown is just beginning. In Ottawa, 1,000 technical workers were handed pink slips this morning, adding to hundreds of thousands of recent job losses. Given these very blunt economic indicators, does the minister believe that Ontario will soon be in recession?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I would say, first off, that it won't be my place to speculate. What I will speculate about is exactly the impact that the Ontario government can have with investors who are looking around the world to invest and asking why they should choose Ontario and why now. What we recognize is that, yes, we know we have challenging times afoot in certain sectors. We also know that other sectors are doing very well. We are in net new jobs in the order of over 450,000.

I will tell the member opposite to look very clearly at the five pillars that we've identified for economic growth in Ontario, substantial investments that are targeting sectors for growth and where this government is prepared to help bring jobs to Ontario.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I wasn't suggesting that you speculate, Minister. I'm suggesting that you look at the economic indicators that we're all faced with. My pessimism does not lie with the people of Ontario but with this government, which thinks it knows best.

All the economic indicators show that your programs are failing. Every major bank is preparing for the worst. Minister, how do you justify the continuation of stale policy in light of these new realities?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: What I will say is that we had an individual in this House, followed by an entire party—the official opposition—who speculated that the advanced manufacturing strategy would not turn into jobs. In fact, in Milton, Ontario—in that very member's backyard—Roxul insulation, with our investment and their investment, is creating 100 new jobs and a great new product for sale around the world. That's what this government did.

I appreciate the pessimism on that side, but what this side sees very clearly is the level of innovation available in Ontario companies today. With a little bit of help from their friends in this government, we're prepared to help with expansion and new innovation so that we can sell products around the world. We'll take on his pessimism any time of day, because this is a government that is working for business in Ontario.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH PROMOTION

M^me^ France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. Why isn't the Ministry of Health Promotion involved in promoting the health of First Nations communities in Ontario?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I thank the member opposite for the question. The First Nations communities are certainly one of our priorities in this province. The Ministry of Health Promotion has many different programs that are aimed at the different communities. All our programs in this particular ministry apply equally to the aboriginal community in Ontario, because we consider the aboriginal community in Ontario to be part of the communities and part of our family in Ontario. They are no different from any other community.

In my different conversations and in listening to the opposition, I get the feeling that the opposition thinks and believes that the aboriginal people are not part of this province and are not part of the people our general program deals with. I have to let you know that my ministry is focused on all the people of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^me^ France Gélinas: How can the Minister of Health Promotion talk about "We are all equal"? First Nations youth are committing suicide at eight times the rate of the rest of Ontarians. Type 2 diabetes is five times higher within the First Nations than the rest of Ontario. Heart disease is 1.5 times higher within the First Nations, and tuberculosis is 10 times higher in First Nations communities.

The Chiefs of Ontario know that they need a focus on the key determinants of health. They know that the healing requires culturally appropriate health promotion. Why won't the Ministry of Health Promotion respect its obligations to the First Nations of Ontario?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: Again, I will say to the member opposite that this ministry and the government of Ontario is quite cognizant of issues that face First Nations people. We are quite cognizant that the First Nations people have a higher incidence of suicide rates and a higher incidence of many other issues that affect our population, and we continue to work. In my particular ministry, we are committed to working with the aboriginal leaders and communities to advance common goals on tobacco control, healthy eating, active living, addiction prevention and increasing aboriginal participation in sports and recreation. In fact, the Ministry of Health Promotion has invested a total of $3.2 million in a number of programs designed to help aboriginal communities. I myself have been to many aboriginal community centres and have been involved. I have been to the aboriginal—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question today is to the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday, you introduced Bill 64, legislation that would ban the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides throughout the province. But, Minister, I'm hearing concerns from my residents in our communities about some parts of your proposal. The Ontario Medical Association, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario and the Canadian Cancer Society are all saying we should reduce our exposure, especially for our children, to unnecessary toxins like the cosmetic pesticides that are used to get rid of the few weeds in our front lawns.

Minister, the residents of my community, though, want to know why, if this government says it's concerned about protecting our families from exposure to unnecessary risk posed by cosmetic pesticides, they would consider exempting golf courses from the ban. Isn't this supposed to be about getting cosmetic pesticides off our land?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, let me compliment the member for the excellent work that he has been doing in his riding for the last five years.

Yes, it is correct that the ban on the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides, which will potentially include about 80 active ingredients in over 300 products, will be the toughest legislation in North America. We are making an exception with respect to golf courses, as we clearly said in our platform commitment during the campaign last year. However, golf courses will only be exempt if they file with the ministry—and this will be set out in regulations later on—an integrated pest management plan that will clearly indicate how they intend to reduce the use of pesticides over a number of years. That's all still to be worked out in regulations.

This legislation is primarily about preventing unnecessary health risks, particularly for our children. Children are much more likely to play on their own lawns, their backyards, schoolyards etc. They need to be protected more than anyone—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Minister, I'm sure my constituents are going to be very happy to hear that golf course operators are going to be treated in a fashion that will keep them responsible.

The other thing that I'm hearing, Minister, from my community is concern about how this whole matter is going to be enforced. With so many homes, schoolyards and parks in each of our communities, how will we know that the law is actually going to be followed? Parents in the community want certainty that their children are playing in safe places and as free as necessary from these unnecessary risks. Kids run around. They play and they explore when they're outdoors, and they're much more likely to come into contact with cosmetic pesticide residue.

How will parents have certainty that when their kids are outside playing, the environment is as safe and clean as possible and free from these harmful products?

1500

Hon. John Gerretsen: The best enforcement mechanism is the fact that we're going to ban the sale of these products as well, and as early as next spring.

I should compliment the leadership that many municipalities have shown in bringing forth some 30 different bylaws across this province, but all of those bylaws basically only deal with the use. Our new law will deal both with banning the use and the sale of these non-essential pesticides.

We will also focus on education. We have set out a budget of about $10 million over the next four years, which will be exclusively used to educate people on the proper use of these particular materials etc.

Enforcement obviously will be part of it as well. We have included in our budget nine additional inspectors. As well, we hope to be working with the municipal world, which was going to use their own enforcement officers with respect to the bylaws that they've already passed, and we hope to use them—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Your Premier promised in 2003 to unclog emergency rooms and, today, five years later, you have rehashed that unfulfilled promise without giving any details, any timeline or any implementation plan. I ask you, Minister, what are the benchmarks you have set to achieve this goal and what are the targets you have set to confirm that you have achieved success? I didn't hear them.

Hon. George Smitherman: First off, I want to thank the honourable member for her question. I really want to say that I think it's a good day dawning in the province of Ontario when opposition parties and governments alike have come to the conclusion that using benchmarks and targets is an appropriate way to drive improvement in health care. We want to thank the honourable member for her encouragement on this point.

We received great encouragement last week from the Wait Time Alliance, which gave Ontario an A rating for their efforts around wait times. That is a compliment to Dr. Alan Hudson and thousands of people on the front lines of health care who have made these improvements. Under his leadership, and using similar approaches, we have every intention of unlocking the challenges with hospital emergency rooms and building on some of the successes that we've achieved in the honourable member's own community at Grand River, where we have substantially enhanced the performance of the ER already. We have more work to do and we're getting on with that work.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: There was a lot of hot air, a lot of puffery and a lot of empty rhetoric this morning. I would say to you that I've heard from some of the emergency room doctors and staff already today and

they're not comforted, nor are their patients. Every day we read about another emergency room crisis. You've had five years. You have no plan. You have no details.

I would ask you again: What benchmarks did you provide today, what goals are you going to achieve and when will we know that you've achieved them? Because up until now, people continue to suffer. You've taken no action, and your Premier has not kept his promise.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member, especially for her admonition about use of colourful language and the temperament of the Legislature. I do want to acknowledge that the honourable member just ran an election campaign that didn't have emergency rooms mentioned in the campaign platform and actually promised to eliminate $3 billion of health care expenditure. We can imagine what the implications would have been.

Our objective is based on a vision of a circumstance in Ontario where patients have greater confidence that when they go to the emergency room, they will be served in a timely way. But to achieve that is to offer all the complementary strategies, like offering people a more appropriate alternative to going to the emergency room in the first place. We're going to continue to invest in community-based care, to enhance access to those things. We're going to work on issues like mental illness and addiction, to enhance the capacity of the communities to resolve these issues, and unclog those capacities in our emergency rooms with timely and appropriate measures, all of this to follow under the leadership of Dr. Alan Hudson.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The minister recently said that he would deal with the beaching process that causes clouds of dust over Hamilton, but this will not solve the main problem. When will the minister enforce the emission laws and when will this ministry issue an order that addresses the serious pollution coming from the industrial stacks in Hamilton?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'd like to thank this member for his continuing interest with respect to the air quality in the province of Ontario and in Hamilton as well. As I indicated to the member before question period today, as a matter of fact the ministry is currently in the process of issuing an order against Dofasco to deal with this situation. That will be set out in a letter to him, in response to a letter that he wrote some time ago, within the next day or so. But I think we should also recognize the fact that over the last two years, we have introduced 59 new and updated air standards—which was the biggest move on air toxins in this province in over 30 years—to deal precisely with the kind of situation that he's talking about.

There are still issues out there. Air quality will always be an issue. It's not just an issue that's created here as a result of the industries that are located in Ontario, but also in the Ohio Valley, as he well knows.

We have put strict limits into place. Those limits will be increased over the next number of years, and particularly, more stringent limits—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: On April 18, an article in the Hamilton Spectator suggested that the issuing of an order may address the pollution that occurs from the process called beaching, but it does nothing about the daily air pollution suffered from the lack of secondary emission control systems on the stacks that certain companies in Hamilton had promised to do before and haven't complied.

The only order that this ministry should be issuing to ArcelorMittal Dofasco and others in Hamilton is the one that deals with the emissions from the stacks, melt shops, coke ovens and blast furnaces. Why hasn't this minister issued those orders?

Hon. John Gerretsen: As I mentioned before, the ministry has issued an order or is about to issue an order with precisely the kind of issues that he's talking about. The company has been ordered to put in more effective pollution controls and improved operating practices dealing with all of the issues that he talked about here.

We take the issue with respect to air quality in the province and in the city of Hamilton very seriously. That's why we've increased the standards over the last couple of years, and that's why we're taking the action that we've taken just within the last couple of days with respect to the order. We want Dofasco and the other steel producers to adhere to these new standards so that we can have the best possible air quality for the people of Ontario and the people of Hamilton.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The Children's Hospital at London Health Sciences Centre lost two pediatric cardiologists in December, which caused a great deal of concern among families across southwestern Ontario. The hospital has been able to recruit three new doctors who will be joining the hospital by the end of the summer.

Can you please tell me and the House what you are doing to improve children's health in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: I thank the honourable member from London–Fanshawe for his keen interest in the issues related to children's health. Like many others, and particularly those individuals in London, I was concerned that in December the Children's Hospital at London Health Sciences lost two pediatric cardiologists. We congratulate them for their recruitment efforts and the news that three cardiologists will be joining, making sure that that capacity at London stays very strong.

Three initiatives that are noteworthy that we've advanced with respect to children's health are the three new childhood immunizations, which we've spoken of

often, saving families up to $600 per child; our newborn screening, where we've gone from worst to first and dramatically enhanced our capacity; and our pediatric wait time initiative, which builds on the successes that we've had with wait time agendas, where we've got 2,300 additional procedures with about $4 million, enhancing access for pediatric services. These are examples of improvements to children's health in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I know that my constituents in London–Fanshawe will be pleased to welcome those three new doctors to our city. As you know, good-quality health care is very important to my constituents.

While we are very appreciative of having these additional doctors, our community of London is still short of doctors. Can you tell the House and the people of Ontario what you're doing to improve the shortage of doctors across this province?

Hon. George Smitherman: I have to say to the people of London that we have to thank them because, as one of our medical schools, they've been so engaged in working co-operatively with the coming to life of a medical school satellite in the community of Windsor, which is an example of enhancing the capacity to train more doctors. We've also got many residents who are active in London and surrounding communities learning their trade and moving forward to independent practice.

1510

We had some very exciting data that came out yesterday from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. It showed that the number of doctors practising in group environments has grown by 181% since 2003-04; more than 6,600 doctors are now practising. The great news is that last year, fully 82% of them took new patients, including 265,000 new patients. Two examples in London where they are absorbing some additional capacity are the Thames Valley Family Health Team and the London Centre of Hope Family Health Team. I think it's very fitting that we see the group model coming to life in a profoundly powerful way for our patients.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, yesterday in Hansard you referenced that stakeholders were consulted regarding the amendments to Bill 12. Would the minister please share with the House which stakeholders agreed with removing the section protecting the identity of children who suffered from abuse and were subsequently adopted?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This consultation has been going on since 2004. We have consulted with adoptive parents, we have consulted with those who were adopted, we've consulted with the privacy commissioner, we've consulted with the children's aid society, we've consulted with as many stakeholders as we could, and we consulted them again with this legislation to make sure that this time we have it right. This legislation that we're moving forward with is in compliance with the privacy commissioner's advice and also with the court decision.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Minister, are these the same stakeholders that you consulted on Bill 183, and subsequently you ended up having to go to court, which is the only reason we're doing Bill 12 now? I ask: Specifically which stakeholders consulted on removing that section? The children's aid societies have said they have grave concerns with the legislation as written.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Of course, when we consult with our stakeholders, we consult with many stakeholders. They don't all agree with us 100%. That's why we have amendments coming from the New Democratic Party and we have amendments coming from the official opposition, and of course they are opposed to it. That's why this government, after consulting, will listen to everyone, and we're coming with Bill 12, which we believe strikes an appropriate balance between privacy and the protection of everyone's rights. I'm very pleased to move forward with Bill 12. This has been waiting for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the Minister of Energy: Minister, we've had in all our ridings many energy marketers knocking on people's doors. In this particular case a senior's door was knocked on. When she said she wanted to check with her husband to see if she would sign the contract, the energy marketer said, "Why? Are you stupid? Can't you make the decision for yourself?" and tried to force her to sign. Do you think that's appropriate in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: No, it isn't. I certainly would encourage the member to give me any further information on that. It's inappropriate behaviour. It shouldn't happen, and we must take steps to stop that. I would say to all of us that there's an organization called the Ontario Energy Board. They regulate these people, as I think the member knows. But that's inappropriate behaviour and we need to find ways to stop that. These organizations are required to deal fairly with the population. So I would say to the member: Let me know about that, but particularly, if you don't mind, let the Ontario Energy Board know about anything that happens like this. The regulated responsibility is to ensure the ethical behaviour of these retailers, so let's make sure that happens.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Each and every one of us in this House has either called that particular organization or has tried to deal with the energy marketers themselves. What you end up with is always the same: More energy peddlers knocking on somebody's door, insulting seniors, trying to force people to sign contracts that they shouldn't be signing.

A simple question: Don't you think it's high time that, as a government, you change the law in this province to not allow that kind of practice so that seniors are not

preyed on and people aren't called stupid because they want to talk to their husbands about a particular contract?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I appreciate the sincerity of what you say there. The public have a right to be treated ethically and fairly on these things. They have a right for things to be explained in plain English or French. They have a right that these retailers perform ethically.

I acknowledge, by the way, that most members in this Legislature maybe have had similar experiences to the ones you've had, but the Ontario Energy Board has been given the legislated authority to deal with it. They should, and will, welcome comments from you or your constituent. I'll undertake to ensure that I reinforce with them the need to be very vigilant in terms of the practices of these retailers. Ontarians deserve fair practices and we should ensure that that happens.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

It's signed by many people from my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and I thank them for their signatures.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: In line with your drive for increasing collegiality in the chamber, I'd like to join with my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora in this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

It's signed by many people, particularly out of the Polish community in western Mississauga. I'm pleased to sign it, support it and ask page Rheanna to carry it for me.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees: In that same spirit of collegiality, I would participate in supporting a petition that was circulated by my colleague Bob Delaney, the MPP for Mississauga–Streetsville. I'm pleased to support the petition and to read it into the record.

"Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Western Mississauga Ambulatory Surgery Centre.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to affix my signature and support the member, as well as the member from Halton, in this proposal.

1520

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I have a petition to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support the petition. I affix my signature and ask Bethany to carry it for me.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have petitions provided to me by St. James' Anglican Church, Central Presbyterian Church, St. John's on the Hill United Church and St. Andrews Galt Presbyterian Church, which read:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

As I agree with the petition, I affix my name thereto.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition, and I will sign it and hand it over to Marco.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: "Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I agree with this petition. I am pleased to add my name and give it to Thomas, the page.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Mr. Kim Craitor: Thank you for recognizing me. My petition is titled "Physical Activity Petition," and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, over the past 25 years, obesity rates have more than tripled for Canadian children between the ages of 12 and 17; and

"Whereas, in Ontario, less than half of students beyond grade 9 take gym classes, a small fraction are involved in school sports programs, and adolescents who are inactive at school are unlikely to be physically active elsewhere; and

"Whereas Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends that adolescents get at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity daily; and

"Whereas a second compulsory physical education credit for secondary schools would result in an increase in adolescents being active;

"Therefore we, the undersigned concerned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Education add a second compulsory physical education credit for secondary schools."

I'm in support of this. I'm pleased to sign my name and give this to the page to take down.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have petitions provided to me by the Cambridge Christian School, First United Church and St. Luke's Anglican Church, which read:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

As I agree with this petition, I will sign same and provide a copy to Ida.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East local health integration network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, its largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact the quality of care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I shall affix my signature to that and pass this to Jordynne.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have received another petition. I guess it's one of those petitions that's very popular.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our spiritual and parliamentary tradition since it was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I will affix my signature and will deliver this to the House.

1530

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have petitions provided to me by Patricia Boughen of Cambridge, David and Karen Kovats of Cambridge, and Valley View Manor of St. Jacobs. The petitions read:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

As I agree with this petition, I will sign same and provide a copy to Prakash, the page.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd like to thank Pastor Charlie Nolting and the parishioners of St. John's Augsburg Lutheran Church, which is also my church, for this petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and send it down to the table with Bethany.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM
RÉFORME LÉGISLATIVE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 22, 2008, on the amendment to the motion by Mr. Bryant to amend the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

M. Gilles Bisson: Je veux dire premièrement que je suis un peu triste qu'on est dans ce débat-là aujourd'hui. Je sais que dans mon temps ici à l'Assemblée—ça fait 18 ou 19 ans—on a eu l'occasion au moins à deux ou trois reprises d'être dans une situation où on était en train de changer le Règlement de la Chambre.

Je veux dire droit au début de ce débat que les changements eux-mêmes aux règlements me concernent un peu moins que ce qui va arriver à la période des questions, et je vais en parler en plus de détails plus tard.

Cette place, cette Assemblée, du temps que je suis arrivé ici en 1990 comparé à aujourd'hui, est très, très différente. Il y avait un temps où la coopération entre le parti du gouvernement et les partis de l'opposition était beaucoup plus développée, parce que les règlements du jour reconnaissaient une couple de faits très importants qu'on a besoin d'avoir dans l'Assemblée.

Premièrement, un gouvernement majoritaire a toujours besoin, et je le dis comme membre de l'opposition, d'avoir le droit de passer ses lois. Parce que le public a choisi un gouvernement majoritaire dans une élection provinciale, le gouvernement, à la fin de la journée, a besoin d'avoir le droit de passer son programme, son agenda, à travers la législation. Mais ça, c'est avec l'œil donné de l'opposition, parce qu'il y a d'autres citoyens de la province de l'Ontario qui, possiblement—et on le sait—n'ont pas voté pour le gouvernement et ils se retrouvent avec des députés de l'opposition. C'est notre ouvrage, c'est notre tâche comme députés de l'opposition, de regarder ce que le gouvernement nous propose comme législation, de le critiquer où il a besoin d'être critiqué, et de l'appuyer où il a besoin d'être appuyé. Quand je suis arrivé à cette Assemblée, cette Législature, le droit de l'opposition était beaucoup plus important qu'il ne l'est aujourd'hui.

Par exemple, quand je suis arrivé en 1990, les députés du gouvernement ou de l'opposition, une fois qu'ils commençaient un débat, pouvaient parler aussi longtemps qu'ils avaient besoin de parler pour faire leurs points sur un projet de loi.

Les membres du gouvernement vont dire—je le sais; j'étais là—« C'est un peu trop long, ce n'est pas beau. Quelqu'un peut prendre le plancher et peut parler pour des journées. » Mais il faut que tu comprennes que l'opposition ne faisait pas ça à toute reprise et pour chaque projet de loi. L'opposition, si elle voulait avoir des amendements sur un projet de loi et négocier une amélioration à un projet de loi qui a été proposé par le gouvernement, utilisait les règles de la Chambre pour essayer d'exercer une certaine pression sur le gouvernement pour faire les amendements nécessaires.

Je peux vous dire que, entre ce que j'ai vu en 1990 et ce que je vois aujourd'hui, il y a une grosse différence dans la manière dont l'Assemblée fonctionne elle-même. Je dirais même que cette Assemblée ne fonctionne plus comme un Parlement doit fonctionner parce que, avec les changements qui ont été faits, oui, par les néo-démocrates dans le temps de M. Rae, et qui ont été accélérés par M. Baird dans le temps de M. Harris, et même avant ça dans le temps de M. Peterson, on a ôté à l'opposition un certain droit qui a été reconnu quand on a créé les Parlements les années passées. C'est pour dire que l'opposition, à la fin de la journée, ne peut jamais frustrer le gouvernement jusqu'au point qu'on ne peut pas passer un projet de loi, mais on a l'habilité, par la manière dont le Parlement a été créé, d'exercer nos droits comme membres de l'opposition pour garder une certaine pression sur le gouvernement pour améliorer des projets de loi. L'opposition, dans le passé, prenait très au sérieux cette responsabilité. Ce qu'on a à cette heure, avec tous les changements de règles, c'est que le gouvernement, non seulement avec sa majorité mais avec les règles qu'on a présentement à l'Assemblée, peut passer un projet de loi très vite à cette Assemblée avec aucune conséquence, n'importe ce que l'opposition dit. Mais même plus important, cela n'a aucune conséquence de ce que le public a à dire. Cela, je pense, est très triste, et ce n'est pas la manière dont un Parlement doit marcher. Mais c'est pour un autre débat.

Je veux dire que, pour ce débat ici qu'on a aujourd'hui, pour moi la grosse question est que le nouveau calendrier qui a été proposé par le gouvernement est vraiment fait d'une manière qui va donner au gouvernement une habilité supérieure de communiquer son agenda au public, et encore frustrer l'opposition.

Présentement, on connaît la manière dont ça marche. L'Assemblée et tous les députés sont ici de bonne heure le matin. La plupart des députés sont ici au bureau à 7 h 30 ou à 8 heures et commencent leurs travaux pour se préparer pour la période des questions, préparer leur programme et d'autres affaires à l'Assemblée et faire leur travail comme législateurs. À 13 h 30, on arrive ici et on commence les procédures avec une période des questions, d'habitude, à environ 14 h 30.

La manière dont c'était désigné avec les règles présentes était pour donner à l'opposition la chance de s'organiser, de faire la recherche nécessaire pour être capable d'arriver à l'Assemblée avec des questions qui ont été préparées et réfléchies, et qu'on a organisées pour demander au gouvernement des questions qui reflètent les sujets du jour.

Le gouvernement veut avancer cette période des questions de 14 heures à 10 h 45. C'est très simple : la raison pour cela est que le gouvernement veut avoir un plus grand contrôle sur la manière dont il organise la communication avec les citoyens de la province de l'Ontario. Donc, ils vont arriver ici à l'Assemblée, ils vont entrer pour la période des questions, les questions vont être posées jusqu'à 11 h 45 et, bang, ils sont partis. Ils sont dans leur limo, ils sont partis quelque part en Ontario pour faire des conférences de presse; ils ne sont pas ici pour répondre aux médias qui sont ici chaque jour et à l'opposition sur le programme qu'ils sont en train de mettre en place.

Donc, le gros problème avec ces règles, ce n'est pas parce qu'on va commencer à siéger à 9 heures le matin pour une session. Écoute, moi, je suis préparé à 7 heures ou à 8 heures le matin. Ça ne me fait pas peur; comme tout le monde, on travaille dans notre société, et aller de bonne heure le matin au Parlement, ce n'est pas la question. Contrairement à ce que M. le Premier ministre a dit, quand il a essayé de dire que les députés commençaient leur ouvrage très tard l'après-midi, on sait que ce n'est pas vrai. Les députés sont ici de bonne heure le matin.

1540

La question pour moi est celle de la période des questions. Si on permet à la période des questions de s'avancer au matin, ça veut dire, un, que l'opposition va avoir moins d'habilité de s'organiser pour la période des questions, et la qualité des questions jusqu'à un certain point, possiblement. Mais, deux, la pire affaire, c'est que ça bloque notre accès aux médias. D'habitude le matin, l'opposition a l'habilité d'avoir une conférence de presse et à inviter ceux et celles dans la communauté ontarienne qui ont certaines questions ou un certain dossier qu'ils veulent avancer sur le plan provincial. On a notre conférence de presse le matin, les médias posent leurs questions, on revient ici pour la période des questions pour deux heures, deux heures et demie; on demande notre question sur le sujet, et le gouvernement a besoin de répondre. Donc, il y a tout un processus où les médias et l'opposition ont la chance de garder le pied du gouvernement au feu sur les dossiers politiques de la province de l'Ontario.

À cette heure, ça va être très difficile pour l'opposition et les médias de garder les pieds de ce gouvernement au feu. Pourquoi? Parce que, sans l'habilité de faire entrer ses groupes le matin, parce qu'on va être ici en se préparant pour la période des questions, et, deux, parce qu'on va être là de bonne heure durant la période des questions, cela va être beaucoup plus difficile de rentrer ses groupes pour avoir cet aperçu d'une conférence de presse, d'avoir les médias qui demandent leurs questions, d'avoir une période des questions où l'opposition demande au gouvernement : « Pourquoi avez-vous fait tel et tel? » ou « Pourquoi n'avez-vous pas fait tel et tel? », et encore pour permettre aux médias l'opportunité de demander au ministre, dans ce qu'on appelle les « scrums », des questions sur le dossier du jour.

Donc, je trouve que c'est vraiment triste qu'on se trouve dans cette situation aujourd'hui où le gouvernement provincial essaie encore de limiter les droits de l'opposition.

In the time I've got left, I want to say a couple of things to my friends in the chamber who may not have been listening through translation. I understand that at times people don't like those devices.

First of all, this is not about when we're going to sit. Let's be real. The Premier got up in the House the other day and said, "I met with farmers, and they thought it was ridiculous that we only start work at 1:30 in the afternoon at Queen's Park." It's a good political point scored by the Premier that sells well in the media. Everybody kind of looks at politicians and they don't like us anyway, and he tried to reinforce among the public that somehow or other provincial members of Parliament never start work until 1:30. Well, we all know that's not true.

The reality is that members are in this assembly or in their constituency offices by 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock every morning and normally are not back at home until 8, 9 or 10 at night. Between coming to this place during the week when the House is in session, preparing yourself for question period, preparing yourself for committee, preparing yourself for debate, meeting with community groups about issues that are important to them, holding press conferences and doing the things we do here, that's why the House never sat until 1:30. It was to give members the time to organize themselves and for the public to have access to members of the government and members of the opposition prior to question period.

There was some logic to it. The logic was that you have a question period in the afternoon. Why? Because it gives an opportunity, for those who may have a problem with a particular government policy, to come to Queen's Park in the morning to meet with opposition and government MPPs to talk about these things before question period starts and, yes, to hold press conferences here at Queen's Park, where that particular community group can hold the government's feet to the fire on a particular question. The media then get involved. They

ask questions of the community group or the provincial organization that comes in, and then they come into question period expecting that the opposition may ask questions on those particular issues that day. The government gets a chance to respond by way of answers to our questions—at times they give us answers; not always—but then the media get a second kick at the can, once we leave question period, in what we call scrums, which are happening now, as we speak, in order to hold the government's feet to the fire. In a democracy, it's a partnership not just between the citizens in this assembly; it's also a partnership between the media and the individual's right to know what is being reported in the papers in this province and giving the media and the opposition the tools they need to hold the government accountable.

I understand that a government, especially a majority government, at the end of the day has the right to have its agenda passed. This is not the debate. I don't care about the rules that were brought into the House around this whole issue. We'll deal with that. But the issue to me is a very simple one: For the government to be held accountable, there needs to be scrutiny, and scrutiny is done by a number of means: by question period; by the media asking questions of the government and doing investigative reporting, putting the question into the public's mind, "Is what the government proposes a good idea or is it not a good idea?" and by opposition members of the assembly standing in this House and demanding answers to particular questions of policy in the province of Ontario. This new schedule of moving question period from the afternoon to the morning is going to very much limit the ability of the opposition and the media to have the type of access that needs to be had in holding a government accountable.

I want to be clear: I don't care if the House sits at 9 in the morning. I don't care if it sits at 8 in the morning. I don't care if it sits until midnight. I've been here long enough; I've had sessions go 24 hours a day when we had the megacity debate in this place. So to me, it's not about, "Oh, you don't want to be here at 9 o'clock in the morning." That has nothing to do with it. The issue is question period. The issue is the ability and the right for the public to know what its government is doing, and there's a process by which the public finds out. First of all, community groups come to this place in the morning to meet with opposition members, to let them and the government members know how they feel about a particular issue. There's a dedicated amount of time where members are not stuck in this House, as we are this afternoon, when they can actually come and meet with us. That's why we have a schedule the way that it is.

More important, the public has the right, as community groups, to hold a press conference in this building; to go to our media studio and have somebody from either government or the opposition sponsor them in the media studio, so that they can tell their story to the media; so that they can stand in our media studio and say to the media, "We think this particular initiative is good or bad, and here are the reasons why." Sometimes, yes, people come to say good things about government; sometimes they come to say bad things. But it's the right of the public.

So the process here has always been—and it is in every other Legislature of a parliamentary-type system—that the people come, they have an opportunity to hold a press conference, and the media scrutinizes them in regard to what they're presenting to the media by way of questions at the end of their press conference. The media asks them questions in order to make sure they're satisfied that what's being presented by this particular organization is something that makes some sense and is valid of reporting.

They then expect the opposition members to come into the House and ask questions so that they can listen not only to the question but, more importantly, to what the answer by the government is; so that the government can respond to what was raised in the morning at the press conference by the provincial organization or others who might be here.

More important, the media gets an opportunity to question the ministers as they walk out the door of this Legislature after question period, to scrutinize the answer, to scrutinize the issue, to find out what is right and what is wrong with this particular thing and then report on it so that the public is informed of what they have the right to know.

What this whole thing is about—it's not about members coming to work early in the morning, and it's not about what's in the rule changes. This is about an attempt—and they will be successful, because they are a majority—of the government to say, "We want to limit the ability of the public and the opposition to scrutinize this government by making it more difficult for them to get access to the media to tell the story."

The second thing they're going to do—I know, 12 o'clock is going to come, and you're going to see all the government limos parked outside of Queen's Park here. The ministers will be dispatched to different parts around this province in the afternoon to go out and give the good-news story of the government of Ontario.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Doing our job.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The member just admitted, "Doing our job." What about the job of the public, sir? What about the job of the opposition?

See, this is the problem. This is the mindset of the government. They think they have a God-inherent right to tell their side of the story, without allowing the media, the public or the opposition to hold them to scrutiny. If that's what you believe democracy is, sir, I don't think you belong in this Legislature, to be quite, quite blunt.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Excuse me, I'd ask you to consider withdrawing those remarks.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Madam Speaker, I withdraw.

The point I make is that government members—and I know; I was there. Go and read the speeches in 1992. I was one of those well-tamed backbench government

members like you guys, who supported Dave Cooke in probably some of the worst rule changes of this place, because I was convinced by the party apparatus and by the Premier, now-Liberal Bob Rae—

Hon. Jim Watson: And Howard.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, Howard was offside. He was one of the few people who was mad at Cooke over it.

But I understand how this place works. There's an extreme amount of pressure put by the Premier's office and cabinet on the backbench members about the right of the government to get its agenda through and why this is so important and, "We've got to do this because, by God, this is what Ontarians want," and everybody falls into place. I understand; I've been around.

What I am saying here is that this is a bad move for democracy. The public has the right to know, and there's a process that has been established that gives the public an ability to know, and that's done, as I said, in a very simple way. It's a partnership, with the government proposing an issue, bringing a bill or announcing a program that the media and the opposition have an opportunity to scrutinize and to ask questions, the government then reflecting and in the end either changing or not changing that particular policy or legislation.

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What this is all about is the government saying, "We want to be able to control"—not the political—"the communications agenda. We want to limit the ability of the opposition to hold our feet to the fire." What is even worse is to withhold the ability of the media to do their job by limiting the opportunities they will have to scrutinize the government through processes. At the end of the day, come 12 o'clock every afternoon, a great number of cabinet ministers and the Premier will be boarding the limos outside Queen's Park, driving down to the Island Airport or Toronto Pearson, getting on planes, travelling out in the afternoon and coming back at night in order to give the good word to the province of Ontario about how great the McGuinty government is. You know what? They've done that in some totalitarian states, and it's not good.

What is great about our system, what is wonderful about the Ontario and British parliamentary system and one of the things we're the most proud of is that we have a system of government that has inserted within the Legislature an ability to scrutinize. If you cannot properly scrutinize the government, you're in trouble in a democracy. The government may make fun of this, the backbenchers might say, "We need to do this, it's important," and the public may not even care at this point, but the point is, in the end, what we're doing is limiting the ability of the public to know what's going on. And the less information the public has, in my view, the greater the disservice the McGuinty government is giving to the public when it comes to how democracy should work.

I am going to definitely vote against these standing order changes. And I want to make it clear: I don't care—you want the House to come in at 8 in the morning? I'll be here with bells on. You want to sit on Friday? I'll be here. Give me a question period, but it's got to be in the afternoon and it's got to be done in such a way that not only the opposition but the media have an opportunity to hold this government to scrutiny—something that I'm convinced needs to happen more and more as I take a look at how some of the files have been handled by this government, on issues such as KI and others.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Health Promotion.

I'm pleased to take part in this debate. I would rather be talking about some of the other pressing and important issues that are facing my community in Ottawa and certainly the province of Ontario, but I do have the floor for a few minutes and I wanted to put some perspective into this debate.

I've received a grand total of zero calls, zero e-mails and zero letters on this issue. This is not a barnburner out in our community. I've checked with other colleagues and, to the best of my knowledge, none of them—or very few, if any—has actually received any calls. That's not to say it's not important, but it's not registering on the radar screen of those men and women who make up our particular ridings. It's not registering because this is not a radical proposal. We're simply asking that we modernize this institution, drag it into the 21st century, make it more efficient so that we can conduct the public's business.

Debate time is going to increase by 25% under this proposal. There will be an increase of 50% in private members' business, which is something that members have asked for for some time. We're going to eliminate evening sittings because we've heard from a number of members the challenges that evening sittings bring, particularly to those with young families. They'd like to get home to their families, if they live in the GTA, or they'd like to go to a constituency or community event. So we're going to limit evening sittings to eight days in the spring and fall sessions.

What seems to be somewhat of a point of contention amongst the opposition is that we're going to begin question period at 10:45 and finish at a set period of time, namely 11:45. I had the pleasure of working for two Speakers of the House of Commons in Ottawa as their communications director. On one of the days in the House of Commons, question period started at 11 o'clock, so 15 minutes off what we're proposing. And guess what? The system works well in Ottawa with a morning start.

The other thing is that it's very difficult for all members to coordinate their schedules, meet with constituents and individuals who want to meet with them. You're never really sure, under the current rules, when question period is going to end. It could end, perhaps, at 2:30, it could end at 3, it could end at 3:30, it could end at 4; it all depends on the routine proceedings. So we're going to make the system a little more efficient.

Just to put in perspective how many days this House sat in 2006, we sat for 106 days, more than any other jurisdiction in Canada. As individual MPPs understand, not everything takes place in this chamber and the world does not revolve around this particular institution. We have an awful lot of important work to do in our ridings and as ministers in our ministries, meeting with groups throughout the province of Ontario. While question period is vitally important from an accountability point of view, it's not going to be any less accountable by having question period start at 10:45.

Most of us start our days well before 8 or 9 o'clock. Many of my colleagues have to travel in from around the GTA, and they're up at 5:30 or 6 to make sure they get to a community event and then get back for question period. If anything, this change is going to make it more difficult for the ministries, because it's probably a lot easier to ask a question than to research the information for the answer you expect is going to come down the pipe. Unlike in the British system, we do not have advance notice of the questions. So we have to be prepared for a wide range of issues that may be in the media that particular morning and may be talked about by various groups in the province of Ontario.

Let me just quote something I saw in the Toronto Star on April 19 that really put in perspective that this debate and the sometimes feigned outrage on the part of the opposition is much ado about nothing. It's a dart to the provincial opposition parties, "For making a big deal out of the trivial; for the past few days, the Progressive Conservatives and New Democrats focused not on weighty matters such as the economy or the looming TTC strike but on the Liberal government's plans to move the daily question period from the afternoon to the morning. The move, which will accommodate the elimination of evening sittings of the Legislature (an opposition demand), was variously denounced as 'cynical' and 'undemocratic' by the PCs and NDP. Their real concern: It will give them less time to prepare for question period. The solution: get to work earlier."

I couldn't have said it better myself.

We even had the leader of the Conservative Party, who indicated that they wanted to reschedule the hours of debate. In the Sudbury Star: "Opposition reaction to the Ontario Liberals' attempt to reschedule legislative debate to daylight hours—including moving question period to 9:30 ... from 3," which has subsequently been changed, "has been unduly petulant....

"Opposition parties need to climb down off their high horse on this one. There will be little sympathy from the public....

"Give the new hours a chance."

Mr. Jeff Leal: Sudbury's celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

Hon. Jim Watson: That's right—a great city. I was in Sudbury last week.

What we're proposing is not particularly revolutionary. We're simply indicating that we want to make this place more efficient. As I said, I think having question period in the morning is probably going to be more difficult for ministers than it will be for the opposition, but it's the right thing to do.

I said earlier that I would much rather be dealing with some of the more substantive issues that are facing our province, particularly municipal issues, which is part of my bailiwick. I enjoy question period; I enjoy getting questions. I'm looking forward to my very first question from my critic in the official opposition, at some point, to ask about some of the important issues that are coming forward, when it comes to the fiscal and service delivery review—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Is that the member from Durham?

Hon. Jim Watson: —the member from Durham is my critic; that's right—some of the issues we're working on with respect to uploading services such as ODB and ODSP, some of the work we've done with respect to gas tax for transit companies like OC Transpo, the TTC and Peterborough Transit. In Ottawa, my hometown, last year they received $36 million in gas tax money. By 2010, there will be close to $1.6 billion in gas tax money going across the province.

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I also want to explain to the public who are interested in this—again, I don't want to be dismissive, but I don't think there is a great hue and cry coming from the public on changes to the standing orders. This is very much inside baseball; it's the rules that govern our activities. The fact of the matter is that this is a very different approach from what the previous government did when it came about wanting to make changes.

Mr. Jeff Leal: What did they do?

Hon. Jim Watson: What they did was quite interesting because they had a stealth approach, where they simply came in and brought in the changes in 1997, for instance, in a somewhat underhanded way. Let me read the St. Catharines Standard:

"As disturbing as the content of the rules is, however, the sneaky manner—no other way to say it—in which the government tried to slide them through is more repulsive. The matter was originally raised by a low-profile, backbench government MPP, smoke-screened in a seemingly innocuous package of changes meant to improve the efficiency of the Legislature and avoid the undue wasting of MPPs' valuable time. It is now apparent that to avoid detection as much as possible the government tabled the proposed changes in the Legislature at 5 p.m. on June 12." That was the St. Catharines Standard editorial of June 21, 1997.

It was a low-profile, backbench government MPP named John Baird who introduced those. Whatever happened to John Baird? I haven't heard much of him lately.

Mr. Jeff Leal: He's in Ottawa.

Hon. Jim Watson: That's right. In fact, he is my member of Parliament and represents my riding.

What Mr. Baird did in terms of getting the legislative changes forward was a world of difference compared to what we're proposing. This has been a very open and transparent process.

Let's just put it in context. This is a pilot project that a committee of the Legislature will be able to review after the spring session. It's not cast in stone. We may come back and say, "It's not working, not what we expected it to be." But let's at least give it a fair chance so that we can recognize that this Legislative Assembly, quite frankly, needs to be modernized.

When I came here from a municipal background, which is a very pragmatic level of government, I was quite surprised at the amount of time that was wasted in this chamber. People were given speaking notes, and many individuals didn't know what they were voting on. It was not the most productive use of time. If we can better manage the time schedule of this particular Legislative Assembly and allow members from all parties to perhaps spend more time in the real world outside of the rarefied air of the Legislative Assembly, I think we will all do a better service to our community, to our stakeholders and to the taxpayers of Ontario.

What's interesting about this particular debate is that the Conservative Party once again has a different position, because during the election campaign Mr. Tory was crystal clear when he said, "You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock in the morning. If you had the sittings start in the morning and finish at suppertime, I think it allows moms and dads and young families to be at home more often with their family and to have the thing be just a bit more family-friendly. So I think it means you'd look more often to start in the morning and have your day proceed so that you could use those hours and finish by suppertime."

Mr. Jeff Leal: Those were the days when leadership mattered.

Hon. Jim Watson: That's right, when leadership mattered, back on August 29.

Fast-forward to February 12, 2008. John Tory expressed concern that a 9:30 a.m. question period was too early and that PC staff "would not have had their morning coffees." Well, I don't know about you, but the vast majority of my constituents in Ottawa West–Nepean start a lot earlier than 9:30 in the morning.

We ask our fellow citizens in our ridings to work hard, to support their families, to pay their taxes, to start early in the day and contribute to the economic well-being of this community, and people come here and say, "So you start your legislative day at 1:30?" It just doesn't make any sense in this day and age, when we're all required to work a little harder and work a little smarter to ensure that we are actually fulfilling the public's business.

I'm quite pleased to support this because, again, we are making much ado about nothing. We are simply asking that we start the day earlier, we increase the amount of private members' time by 50%, we increase the daily debate time by 25%, we start at 9 in the morning, which is a reasonable time to start, and we have question period at 10:45. I don't see this as a threat to democracy.

We hear the hyperbole and the outrage that this is going to be hard on the press. I don't think it's going to be hard on the press. The press are hard-working and they have deadlines, the print reporters—quite frankly, it will give them more time to find people to question on government initiatives above and beyond the opposition. I understand that the opposition are going to have to share the limelight with real Ontarians who may want to express an opinion on something that came up in question period. I think the press—I was proud to be a member of the press, not for a long period of time, but in television and print—will appreciate the fact that, after question period, they will have more time to go out beyond the confines of Queen's Park and seek out differing opinions on government initiatives and issues that came up in question period.

I'm very pleased that our government has brought this forward. I would hope that we wouldn't spend an inordinate amount of time on this because, again, this is not a burning issue amongst the people in Ottawa West–Nepean. I don't know about in other ridings. I don't know if your phone lines are burning up. But I would rather have us talk about some of the pressing issues in the municipal world, in education.

I'm going a little off topic, Madam Speaker, but the national champion spelling bee winner was from my riding: Emma Brownlie from D. Roy Kennedy Public School. We're proud of her.

The work that we have to do in our community in terms of public safety and the 101 new police officers that we've added; I'd like to talk about the cosmetic pesticides ban and the good work that Barb Lajeunesse did in Ottawa to ensure that this has come to this Legislative Assembly; the work we're doing at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, the extra doctors who have been hired. All of these are issues that I get letters on, I get e-mails on and I get visits on. I don't get letters, e-mails or visits on the inner workings of the calendar of the Legislative Assembly.

I'm very proud to support this. As I mentioned earlier, I'm going to share my time with the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margarett R. Best: It certainly is a pleasure for me to rise in this Legislature this afternoon to participate in this debate. This is my first time participating, and I am very honoured and humbled to do so.

Applause.

Hon. Margarett R. Best: Thank you.

This debate deals with the modernization of the Legislature. I'm certainly pleased to be speaking after my honourable colleague, who represents us well all the time, my colleague from Ottawa West–Nepean.

As a new member—and I am affectionately referred to as a "newbie" around here—I have become aware of the long hours that the Legislature sits. While I haven't been here very long, I'm very cognizant of the fact that many of my colleagues have issues with the fact that they have to be here in the evenings and until late at night in many cases.

I am so glad that we were able to have a discussion on this issue, and the opposition was very much involved

with it as well. They listened and discussed that it would be better for us not have any debates on Fridays. Not having debates on Fridays provides the members with the opportunity to attend various community events in their ridings.

My riding is Scarborough–Guildwood. This riding is a very, very diverse riding. I have had the pleasure of being able to attend outside of the Legislature because, as a minister, I only have to sit in the Legislature during question period. So I, in particular, have very different requirements in terms of being in the Legislature as opposed to the members who are here all the time and who have to sit every single day and every single evening.

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When I'm not in the Legislature, I am out in the community. As I said before, I'm from the community of Scarborough–Guildwood, one of the most diverse places on Earth—and in Ontario as well. Ontario is one of the most diverse places in the world. It represents people from every corner of the globe.

My presence in this Legislature gives hope to so many people who are here from different parts of the world, that they have an opportunity in this province and that they can be a part of this great procedure that we have here, of being involved in the government process. The people of Scarborough–Guildwood are very happy when I come out to the events that they have in their riding. I participate and am able to listen to the issues that affect them. So when we have time to get out of the House, to be able to spend time in our communities, it is very important for our communities.

Just last week when I was out in my community, I was able to speak to a young lady who had met me at an event that I was at outside of my hours in the Legislature—or outside of my hours that I am involved in duties relating to the ministry in this province. She was able to tell me that she was so pleased to have heard me speak at her church, that she felt so connected with me. She had some really serious issues that she felt she could come to sit down with me, talk to me about; that I could be a role model for her. I could help to direct the path of her life. She felt that she could trust me, speak with me.

I also go to different association events in the community—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I just remind the minister to speak to the issue on the table, which is the motion?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: Yes. The reason I am speaking about these different things is because this, to me, is very directly related to time that we spend in the Legislature. When we have time outside of the Legislature, we are able to speak with the people in our community and—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Your time is complete.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I understand it was the first time that the minister participated in debate. I will just give her one little hint: Keep an eye on that clock, because they cut you off when the time runs out. There's no warning and no grace time here in the Legislature.

Anyhow, I'm pleased to join the debate on this motion. It is interesting. I heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing speaking earlier. He seems to speak out of two sides on this issue. We'll get to that a little later.

But we certainly do want to talk about the whole issue of standing order changes and how this Legislature works. That is the crux of my concern. You see, when Dalton McGuinty was elected Premier and in his throne speech, he said, "We are going to make this Legislature more accountable, and we are going to make all MPPs more relevant."

Now let's just see what he has done to do that. I'll sum it up very quickly: absolutely nothing. That's what he has done to follow through on that promise. Nothing. He talked about making MPPs more relevant, but what do we have? We still have a committee system that works the same way: six members from the government; three members from the opposition.

Case in point: The other day there were committee hearings on Bill 12, the new adoption legislation. Did Liberal members of that committee follow what they truly believed, or did they just take their orders from the Premier's office? One by one, they voted down the amendments that would have protected victims of abuse—an amendment that was in the original Bill 183 that has been taken out of Bill 12. Did they vote to support those amendments? No, they shot them down. In fact one member, the member from York South–Weston, left the hearings during that vote.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I'd like to remind the member that we really don't refer to the times that members are in or out of—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's not an absence, Madam Speaker. She left the hearings so as not to vote, because she couldn't support that, but she didn't want to vote against what the Premier's office was telling them to do as members. That is the crux of the problem in this Legislature. We need some changes that actually do make MPPs more relevant. In the federal Parliament, the opposition actually controls many committees. They actually have the majority on committees, so those committees can be used to force the government into real, concrete action on issues.

Here, there are two kinds of people who sit on the government side—and I don't in any way say this to be hard on them or to be disparaging in any way: those who are in cabinet and want to stay there, and those who will do anything to get into cabinet. If the Premier's office tells you, "Vote this way," that's exactly the way you'll be voting. We have to ask ourselves if the parliamentary system is actually working when the power is completely centralized in the Premier's office. We have a House here of 107 members, but the government holds the majority. In fact, that ensures that they will win a vote on every bill if they choose to push it. So the power of the government is not in question, but exercising that power wisely and

fairly is something that is incumbent on the government. The more powerful the majority, the more incumbent that principle becomes. Instead of treating this institution and the role of MPPs in a more valued way, they've used that power to in fact neuter MPPs even further.

It is a complete misrepresentation of the issue when the government says that members of the opposition don't want to go to work at 9 o'clock in the morning. First of all, I would suspect that most, if not all, members are here and at work by 9 o'clock every morning, because it's an opportune time to return telephone calls, to deal with issues that have been left from the day before because debate has gone into evening, to get back to constituents and to return e-mails, voice-mails or whatever. It's an opportune time because they all know that we also have strategy sessions in the morning to prepare for question period. The implication that members of the opposition don't want to go to work is simply false and unfair, and it misrepresents what actually goes on in the life of members of this Legislature. Quite frankly, it demeans all members for the Premier to imply that you should be at work at 9 o'clock. I can assure you that most members are. I won't even speak about myself, because I'm not here to talk about what I do as a member. The people of my constituency have already passed judgment on that.

The changes that the opposition are asking for are not really different, from a timetable point of view, from what the government has proposed, save for one very significant difference. We're saying, have question period at 1 o'clock, set, period, finished; no diversion from that. It's 1 o'clock every day, Monday to Thursday. It's not going to change the amount of time for debate that this Legislature is allowed to have, because instead of question period being in the morning, the debate will be in the morning. What it does change, though—it's sure going to change the afternoons for the ministers of the crown in this province. Can you see it? At 2 o'clock it'll be just a line-up of limousines outside Queen's Park: "Hey, we're getting out of here. The other boys, they have to work." The other folks are going to be working in the afternoon, finishing up on debate. But the ministers: Sorry, 11:45, go for lunch and then they'll be out of here. If we had question period at 2 o'clock, they'd still have to be in in the afternoon. How many ministers do you think we're going to see in the Ontario Legislature in the afternoon under these new standing orders?

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Hon. Jim Watson: You have to have two.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, we're going to have two, but that will be it.

Do you know what the morning question period could be good for? It could be good for the golf courses. The ministers will have those cars waiting outside and maybe schedule a meeting at the local 18-hole golf course—a great place to meet some of their clients or something, you know? That's what it could be good for. There is nothing wrong with having question period at 1 o'clock in the afternoon.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Madam Speaker, I distinctly heard the member for Essex address me in a derogatory fashion. In fact, he said, "What an idiot." I ask the member for Essex, who is not in his seat, to either withdraw that—

Interjection: He's not here.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm sorry, the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Speaker, I'd ask for the clock to be held, please.

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: The member is erroneously accusing members who aren't even in this House of saying things. I would ask that the member withdraw those accusations and know who the members of the House are.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): That isn't a point of order.

I did not hear the comment by the member from Essex, so I ask the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to continue with his debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker.

There will be no issue with the amount of time we spend in this chamber if the question period is at 1 o'clock in the afternoon as opposed to 10:45 in the morning. For the government to package it in any way that demeans the members of this Legislature or questions their motives is simply wrong.

I'll talk about the motivation of the government. When the government makes changes to the standing orders, there's one motive involved, one motive they're following; that is, how do we make it more difficult for members on the opposition side and easier for members on the government side?

That's what these standing order changes are about. They talk about them being family-friendly—I spoke about this last night. It just speaks to the nearsightedness of the government House leader when he says, "Look, we're going to have members being able to go to their son's hockey game or to a dance recital, or have dinner with their family."

I'd like to ask any member who doesn't live in Toronto if that's an option, whether you sit here at night or not. It's just not an option. In fact, in the case of myself, I cannot take a plane or a train to the riding. There's only one method of getting home, and that's driving. There's only one way to get back to the riding, and that's by vehicle.

The Premier was going on about rapid transit yesterday, and I'm just wondering when he's going to bring rapid transit to Renfrew county. When is the subway going to be running in Renfrew county? I don't expect that to happen in the near future. But one thing they could do, if they really wanted to respect rural people: Perhaps they could give some of that gas tax to rural municipalities. They should give it to the rural municipalities that don't have public transportation systems, just as the federal government does.

I have second reading of a private member's bill next Thursday, and I hope that all the rural members on that side of the House will support that. Otherwise, I hope they can go home to their communities and say, "We don't support you getting gas tax from the provincial government."

Hon. Jim Watson: You're taking money away from Pembroke—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Municipal Affairs says, "You're taking money away from Pembroke." In fact, the city of Pembroke supports this resolution, because, you see, they don't see the world in quite the way that the Liberal cabinet does, where the Liberal cabinet wants to make sure they can defend their interests in Toronto. People in rural Ontario know that everybody should get a share of that tax, just as the federal government believes. You see, there are no options in rural Ontario, but that's for next Thursday.

I want to just go over some of the changes that the government has proposed in this amendment and see what the problem would be. I do want to talk about the address of the Minister of Municipal Affairs earlier. On the one hand, he said that the members of the opposition don't seem to want to get to work here, but on the other hand, he says we really need to spend less time here and be out in the communities. I'm just not sure what side of that argument he's on. Do you want to spend less time here and be out in the communities, or are you accusing the members of the opposition of not wanting to be here?

Our timetable that we proposed goes from 9:30 to 6, Monday to Wednesday, and 5:45 on Thursday. The other thing the government is doing is they're taking private members' business and shuffling it off to Thursday afternoon. Well, who is going to be here on Thursday afternoon?

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Health Promotion both say they'll be here. We'll be checking that out on Thursday afternoons to make sure that they're here for private members' business, because I'm sure that they wouldn't say that if they don't intend to be here on Thursdays. I'm looking forward to that.

I can tell you that unless it's a private member's bill that is of particular interest to me, I won't be here. I'll be heading home to my constituency. I'll be getting on the road to Barry's Bay on Thursday afternoon. If it's question period, that's another story. But if it's not a private member's bill that I have a particular interest in or one that another member has specifically asked me to speak to and support, I will likely be getting into my car and getting home to the good people of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on Thursday afternoon, as opposed to waiting for private members' business.

There's no reason to move private members' business from the morning. It's an important part of this Legislature, and we shouldn't be giving it short shift by throwing it out there on Thursday afternoon. Take a look on a Thursday afternoon under today's standing orders, what we work under today, and see how many people are here at 5 o'clock on Thursday afternoon. Hardly enough for a quorum many times, I'm sure.

So I think that those kinds of changes are something that the opposition has, in a very positive way, put forth in these amendments. They would make this chamber work just as well as under the proposal by the government.

The government just seems to want to have that question period in the morning so that cabinet ministers won't have to be around in the afternoon. What else could the motive be? What would be wrong with having those 1 o'clock question periods? We haven't heard a single constructive reason why that question period should be at 10:45 as opposed to 1 o'clock, other than for the members of the cabinet and government to throw things at the opposition and say that the reason they don't want question period at 10:45 is that they don't want to work in the morning. That's wrong; that's misrepresentative. They should have a more fair outlook about how they want to go through these changes than to make those kinds of statements with regard to the opposition and their willingness to be in this chamber.

So there are certainly some positive amendments that have been put forth by the opposition through this resolution, and—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Not afraid of hard work.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Transportation is making further interjections, but I'm going to choose not to respond to that one—unless he's implying that I'm afraid of hard work, and I suppose everybody in this chamber is entitled to their opinion. That's the nice thing about opinions: Everybody's got one. Some of them I don't happen to share, nor am I compelled to, but I certainly respect the fact that the Minister of Transportation has an opinion. In fact, I find him to be one of the most likely ministers to be in this chamber, and one who quite frankly does make a somewhat—if I could characterize it—weak attempt to actually answer questions sometimes, although it's not—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, that's not fair.

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Hon. James J. Bradley: I was going to use it in my campaign literature.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, I'm not going to give you that much. As we know, it is the custom on the other side of the House to not answer questions. In fact, why we call it question period—I know that's an old joke; it isn't mine, but it's a standing order joke, I suppose, or a standing joke—when it isn't question period is a mystery to everybody, because it's certainly not—

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's question period; it's just not answer period.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, thank you very much. The member for Welland is always there to help me out when I start to get a little bit—

Interjection: Muddled.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —muddled. Yes, it's certainly question period, not answer period. In my four years, I can't say that I have ever gotten an answer. Although I must say, four times a day, when the Liberal members throw out the lob balls, they get an answer. Mind you, those questions are not the toughest to answer either. They should be under "short ministerial statements" as opposed to questions and answers, because they have nothing to do with anything that is troubling the citizens or the people of Ontario. It's just an opportunity for the ministers to pump—it should be called "pumping chests time" or something.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I've got to tell you, John O'Toole answered one of my questions when he was in government.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I remember that too, but he did it in the video part of it, not the audio.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's right. They picked it up on video.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, I heard about that. I wasn't here then.

I want to wrap up because I am running out of time. Unlike the Minister of Health Promotion, I'm going to be keeping a close eye on that clock so that I don't actually get cut off early. I know that whenever I'm up here, the members of the government would wish that I would be cut off early, because I don't think they like what I say sometimes. At the same time, we have a responsibility here in this Legislature to ensure—you see, on the one side we've got the owl and on the other side we've got the eagle. I pay attention to those, because it is our responsibility as an opposition, particularly when the government is trying to cloud the issue and give the people the impression, as the minister says, "Well, it's all inside baseball"—he's right. Most people don't care what's happening between 9 and 6 o'clock. They just want to know that the government is working on their behalf and that the opposition is doing its job to ensure that the government is doing their job. I'll continue to do my job.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Some members have said that they're pleased to take part in this debate. I want to say at the outset that I'm actually troubled by this debate. I'm troubled by this debate because, if anything, I think that in the modern world of British parliamentary democracies, we need to put in place more measures to hold governments accountable, particularly majority governments.

The reality that I think most of us who have been around here for a while recognize is that in a British parliamentary system, a majority government can almost behave in a dictatorial fashion. They can literally bring forward any legislation they want. They can use their majority to force through that legislation. They can shut down committees. They can even shut down the Legislature when it's convenient for them and simply adjourn the Legislature and go home. Majority governments in a British parliamentary democratic system today can do a number of things to avoid scrutiny by the media and to avoid scrutiny by the public, to literally have their way.

So I find it troubling that a government would bring forward changes unilaterally and simply say, "Well, we're going to change the way this place operates, we're going to change the way a majority government is held accountable, and we don't care what the opposition says."

I've heard a few government spokespersons say, "Well, people don't understand this, or people don't pay a lot of attention to it." You're right: A lot of people don't get into the intricacies of how a democracy works or how the mechanisms are put in place and have been put in place over time to ensure accountability and to ensure responsibility. A lot of people don't get into the intricacies of that; that's something we should get into. As members of this Legislature, we should care about this. But I think what we're seeing is government members who are going to be pretty self-serving on this, who don't care, really, if an element of accountability and an element of responsibility is removed from this place.

When I first was told that this is what the McGuinty government intended to do, that they were going to bring forward, unilaterally, some proposed changes and, specifically, that they were going to fool around with question period, I got in touch with someone who knows a lot about this place. In fact, he's written a book about this place. Professor Graham White at the University of Toronto has written this book, The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis. Part of the reason I called him is because he spent rather a good part of his life working here, being an analyst and a critic of how this Legislature works. He spent six years in the Clerk's office at the assembly, working mostly on procedural issues, and this is a procedural issue.

"After leaving the assembly, I kept a close connection with Queen's Park, serving, for example, as director of the Ontario legislative internship program and conducting research on the assembly. As recently as this month, one of the current MPPs was kind enough to tell me that he found my book, The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis, quite useful when he was first elected a few years ago."

I asked Professor White for his analysis of the rule changes as presented by the McGuinty government, and this is what he had to say: "I am firmly of the view that the proposal to move question period into the morning represents a serious and entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the assembly in performing one of its key functions, holding the government to account."

This is not somebody who has a partisan axe to grind. He is not someone who self-identifies as a Conservative, an NDP or a Liberal. He is somebody who has spent a lifetime either working here or analyzing and writing about this place. To say it again: "I am firmly of the view that the proposal to move question period into the morning represents a serious and entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the assembly in performing

one of its key functions, holding the government to account."

Then he goes on, and I think it's worthwhile for all members to hear what he has to say:

"To be sure, question period ... remains by far the most effective mechanism for fostering government accountability and, by extension, for keeping the people of Ontario aware of their government's successes and failures. It is most certainly the only legislative proceeding to which the media pays regular attention.

"In short, a vibrant, effective question period is essential to the health of democracy in this province."

The government says, "Oh, we're simply moving the time." This is what he has to say about that:

"Moving question period into the morning would severely undercut its effectiveness. I understand that the government's initial plan was to begin question period at 9 a.m. While the revised proposed starting time of 10:45 is somewhat better, it would still leave the opposition in a very difficult position. Effective questions require planning, research and reflection. This is difficult enough when question period occurs in the early afternoon but would be all but impossible for a morning question period. It takes time to find and process the facts, to locate and contact experts inside and outside government, to solicit information and opinion from people and organizations affected by government and to organize this material into a coherent question period strategy. Some of this could be done the day before but much of it cannot; question period's effectiveness and its attraction to the media depend heavily on immediacy. Many important questions originate in stories published in the main newspapers, all of which are published in the morning, but it takes time to confirm material from the papers and to conduct the further research necessary for effective questioning."

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He finalizes this by saying, "Let me make three final points. First, while I do not have exhaustive information about all British parliamentary institutions, I am aware of basic procedural rules in all Canadian parliaments—federal, provincial, and territorial—as well as those in the UK. In all, question period is routinely held in the afternoon."

The final quote: "The opposition has a duty to perform—not for nothing is it termed 'Her Majesty's loyal opposition'—and the government should not take actions, such as it has proposed in this instance, that would, for no good reason, significantly hamper the opposition in performing its important duty of holding the government to account."

I say again: This is someone who has spent essentially a lifetime either working here as a clerk, working in the interns program or as an academic studying this institution. He says very clearly that what the McGuinty government wants to do here is wrong. What the McGuinty government wants to do here is anti-democratic. What the McGuinty government intends to do here is to undermine one of the basic democratic institutions: question period, when the government has to respond and has to at least try to avoid answering the question. It's very clear.

But he's not alone, because recently—in fact, on April 22—the Premier received a letter from the very journalists who work here, the journalists who try to keep the citizens of Ontario informed about what their government is doing or not doing. This is what the head of the press gallery had to say:

"At the annual general meeting of the Queen's Park press gallery today, members"—meaning journalists—"voted unanimously to raise concerns about the government's proposed new legislative calendar.

"Gallery members"—meaning journalists—"have grave misgivings the new schedule would limit access to cabinet ministers and the Premier by reporters in the following ways:

"(1) The fact that post-question-period scrums would take place shortly before noon would make it difficult, if not impossible, for broadcast reporters to attend while they are filing for noon newscasts or doing live hits at noon."

So the very people who are supposed to try to keep the public informed are saying that what the McGuinty government is doing would make it difficult for them to do their job.

"This creates an unacceptable gap in access between broadcast and print reporters.

"(2) On cabinet and caucus days, reporters now have two opportunities to scrum ministers, in the morning and again in the afternoon following question period. The new schedule would cut this access in half.

"The gallery considers that any reduction in access would undermine the function of a free press at Queen's Park.

"(3) Losing the access to ministers after question period in the afternoon makes it more difficult for reporters to get reaction to new stories breaking later in the day."

The question I have to ask is this: The reporters who are part of a free press say that this is a bad idea. Someone who worked as a clerk in this Legislature, who worked in the internship program and who now is an academic studying this institution, says that what the McGuinty government is proposing here is wrong, will undermine democracy and will undermine the capacity of people to hold a majority government accountable. If the journalists who are part of a free press say that this is a bad idea, and if an academic who has made his life studying this place and working in this place says that it's a bad idea, why would the McGuinty government be doing this?

They've offered up some silly notions. They call it family-friendly. I think anybody who thinks for a moment would see that this is an absurd attempt at a cover-up. They've tried to say that this is going to make the place run more efficiently.

This is also about accountability, holding a majority government accountable. The public has an interest in that, as well, in holding a majority government ac-

countable. Whatever might be achieved in efficiency—and I don't see anything in these rules that would achieve anything by efficiency—should not be accomplished at the expense of democratic accountability. And that should concern all members of this Legislature.

Some government members like to think they're going to be in government forever. Let me tell you, that just ain't so in Ontario. I would urge government members to be thinking about the day when you are in opposition and you are trying to hold a majority government accountable and you are trying to ensure that a free and democratic press can also be positioned to hold a government accountable.

The media say that this is a bad idea. Academics who study this say it's a bad idea. So why would the McGuinty government be trying to do it? Let me offer you a plausible answer. It's not an answer that respects democracy, but let me offer a plausible answer. The McGuinty government would like to make question period less significant. The McGuinty government wants to engage in news management. So if you put question period at a time when it's very difficult to do research—imagine: Are you supposed to call somebody up at 6 a.m. and say, "Are these the facts as you understand them?" How many people do you think you are going to get at 6 a.m.? How many people do you think you are going to be able to contact at 6 a.m.? It makes research very, very difficult. It makes research, in some cases, almost impossible.

So here's an attempt to make question period less significant, to make question period more inconvenient for the media. It then gives the government more time in the rest of the day to engineer other media stories, hold another photo-op here, hold a photo-op there, and basically undermine question period as an effective mechanism to hold majority governments accountable. From the media perspective—and I think they are right on this. They also have to do research, they also have to check facts and they also have to do preparation work in order to ensure that good questions are asked, meaningful questions are asked, effective questions are asked, where you could do good follow-up. They say very clearly that this proposal is going to take that away.

I just want to deal with something else that I find very troubling. Despite the government's protest, this whole proposal to change the time of question period, to change the rules, was not part of a joint proposal with the opposition. Government unilaterally, on a Sunday, announced this and tried to spin it as somehow being family-friendly. The government has not budged one iota on its original position. It came here with the intention that it was going to undermine question period as an effective, democratic institution, that it was going to undermine the effectiveness of question period, and the government has continued with that agenda. I just say to government members—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Have you filed your receipts? What about the member for Welland?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Somebody who used to be the Speaker apparently wants to get in the debate. I would suggest that he can wait his turn if he thinks he has something reasonable to say now.

1650

The fact of the matter is, I think it's bad for democracy when governments unilaterally say, "We're going to change the rules of democracy," and that opposition members and opposition parties and even the press who cover this place have no say and their views are unimportant. I believe it is very dangerous for democracy when majority governments start to proceed in that way.

Here we are, Speaker. Academics who have studied this institution, who have studied other British parliamentary democracies, say that this is an exercise to undermine question period and to undermine the opposition's capacity to hold majority governments accountable. The media, the journalists who cover this place, say the same thing.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Not all.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Minister of Transportation says, "Not all" of them. It was a unanimous vote of the press gallery, I remind the Minister of Transportation, to write a letter to the Premier saying that this is a bad idea, that this undermines democracy and it undermines a free and democratic press.

I find this very troubling. I find it very anti-democratic. I think, frankly, it will not only undermine question period but it will undermine this institution, which is important for democracy. I think it will result in majority governments in the future being able to avoid scrutiny, accountability and responsibility, and none of that is good for this institution and none of that is good for democracy in Ontario.

Let me just finally say that this is not about whether we start debate at 8 a.m. If the government wants to start debate at 8 a.m., I'm fine with that. I was part of a caucus that forced the former Conservative government to sit around the clock, 24 hours a day, for 10 days. I was quite happy to come in here at 2 in the morning and start my shift, I was quite happy to come in at 8 in the evening and start my shift and I was quite happy to come back for question period when it would normally appear.

This is not about when the House sits or doesn't sit; this is about when question period, the most effective accountability mechanism that we have in a parliamentary democracy, is held. Both the academics who've looked at what the McGuinty government is doing and members of the free press who've looked at what the McGuinty government is doing condemn this as an anti-democratic act by a government that is desperate to avoid scrutiny by the people of Ontario.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I will be sharing my time with the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and the member from London–Fanshawe.

I would like to take this opportunity to bring some clarity to what happened yesterday while the Standing Committee on Social Policy was meeting. I am very

disappointed at the unfair accusations that were made in the House today by some opposition members—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I just interrupt the member and remind her that the debate is on the standing order changes, the motion that's before this House now, and that should be the focus of the member's remarks.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: That is on the amendment, and one of the opposition members has brought that forward. I'm answering to that and to the bill.

What I would say is that if the opposition members had just asked me, I could have told them why I left the room. I want to make it absolutely clear that I support the bill. That's why I voted in favour of it today. I did not receive any phone calls from the Premier's office. I also want to make that clear.

If the opposition is so committed to family-friendly, then they could have just asked me and I would have told them that I was assuring myself that my daughter was okay. I thought the discussion was still going on and that's why I left. So I find these accusations really insulting to me. I don't think this is an example of co-operation and I don't think it's an example of family-friendly or the way we should be acting between colleagues. Not everything should be twisted into partisan politics. We're all human beings, we all have loved ones, and we owe to each other at least the decency to find out the facts before we comment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I want to also speak on the whole issue of "family-friendly." As the member for York South–Weston has said, "family-friendly" is important in all of this. We are trying to create a Legislature that allows all members to address those family needs they have. That isn't just about—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Bullshit.

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Leal: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I just heard something from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke that I believe is certainly unparliamentary.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member from Peterborough. I also heard the remark from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and would ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Now I've lost my train of thought here. I was talking about how "family-friendly" means different things to people in this House. As chair of the Liberal women's caucus—we often think of women as being the ones who nurture and concern themselves about family. But we have members of all genders who are involved in their families. They're involved with their children. It's not just about the three-year-olds or the twins; it's also about parents. There are members who are taking care of aging parents. There are any numbers of reasons that we concern ourselves around families. We need to make sure that the Legislature adjusts itself.

For many years I've believed that change is sometimes welcome and change is sometimes resisted, but the one thing that holds true all the time is that change is inevitable. That is what's happening here: We are changing the Legislature.

I look back at some of the history, and the member from Welland mentioned tradition yesterday. We've gotten rid of some traditions. We had a tradition in this House that the women wore hats. We had that tradition till 1960. We wore hats. There was a tradition during the Depression that married women were let go from the public service. We also had a situation even in the 1950s where women who were married were given positions only as long as there was no one who was single and available to do the jobs. As soon as they found someone who was single, then the married woman was let go. We've had changes in traditions, then, and those things are very important for us to do.

As far as changing the time and getting up early, well, I was a night person until I married a farmer, and then I started getting up early. One thing that really clinched it was when my kids were born, and anybody who has children knows that you never sleep in when you have kids. That just stops right there. So for me, starting early is actually the best time of the day. I actually think clearly and I'm working and I can speak. When we go into evening debates, the quality of the debates deteriorates, and I find that very frustrating. I think we should be working in the daytime, when all of us are at our best.

Some of our constituents watch us, and I know they watch us in the evenings, when they have the reruns, so to speak, of the Legislature. They don't care whether or not we start at 9 in the morning. As a matter of fact, when people ask me what time we start in the House and I say "1:30," I always feel a little embarrassed. I always feel like I have to add the fact that I've got meetings in the morning and I'm doing something, because in my riding most people start their day early and they are working at 9 o'clock; they've been at work for a couple of hours by that time. To them, the idea that I don't really start in the House until 1:30—they kind of look at me as if to say, "What else are you doing? You don't do anything until 1:30." I feel I'm always apologizing for that.

1700

Yesterday in the debate, the member for Simcoe–Grey started talking about question period. He said that the media couldn't report at the noon news. That is exactly what's happening now. The media does not report on question period at the noon news. If we start doing question period at 10:45, they will have an opportunity to report it during their noon news. I fully expect that any of the hot issues of the day will probably be the lead questions and there'll be lots of time for the media to do the research and get those things out so that they become the lead item in the noon news. There's more than enough opportunity there for all of us to see.

I think, when we talk about the media and the motion they put forward—I notice they don't condemn it, they simply say they're concerned. Of course they're con-

cerned; aren't we all? Whenever there is change, we look at it very carefully, and so do they and so we all should. Change, like I say, is inevitable, but it should be carefully planned and we should make sure that it serves the purposes that we all need it to.

I want to be able to say that I can spend more time in my riding. I find, having been elected in 2003, my greatest fear is losing touch with my constituents. I find that when I'm at Queen's Park, as much as we spend the time in debate, I feel very insulated here. I talk to my constituents by phone, I read the local press, but I don't really know what life is like for my constituents until I get back there on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Sometimes the best way for me to get in touch with my constituents is to actually go shopping. Now, that can be a bit of a dangerous thing as we all know; I've been known to get stuck in a grocery store for two hours, as I try to make my way around and I keep getting stopped by constituents. On the other hand, it also tells me a lot about what their lives are like on a day-to-day basis and what's really worrying them. They're very frank; of course, in a rural area, we all know our constituents are very frank. They tell us what's really on their minds. Those things are very important to me.

I find, having been on municipal council, that we spend an awful lot of time here debating. The quality of the debate, as I say, worries me at times. Having been on municipal council, we used to do a number of items at a meeting. We made multiple decisions at one meeting. Now, we can be here and we are debating for days.

After a while, the debate becomes redundant. The points have been made and nothing new is being added. At that point, I often wonder, "Why don't we stop?" Why don't we, at that point, stop and make a decision? Why do we feel we have to add all these hours and keep debating when, at the end of the day, we pretty much all know how we're going to vote? The most critical things that can be said are said early in the debate. After that it's mostly redundant. There are occasions where there may be an issue where there's a lot of need for discussion, but we often have situations in bills where all the parties essentially agree. So the debate is actually just a formality. We could be doing more work than we are.

I feel it's important for us to start looking at how we can be more responsive. We have constituents who work in a world where things move very quickly, decisions are made quickly and they're responding to what their situations are on a very quick basis. We have just-in-time on so many things, and yet we come here and things slow down. For our constituents, we are always trying to say, "Well, it takes time in government." Does it really have to do that? Does it really have to take that much time?

I think we could be moving things along much better. I think, with the new scheduling and the new standing orders, we're going to start to address those kinds of things. We're coming into the modern world, where we start to work in the same way that our constituents do.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I don't recall there being a request to split the time with London–Fanshawe. Could I ask the clerks? Did you hear that request? I believe the member for York South–Weston asked to split the time with London–Fanshawe. Do the clerks have that on record? All right, member for London–Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity after all to speak and support the motion before us this afternoon. It's an important issue. I remember, when the House leader brought it to us at the beginning, I wasn't in support of this idea of changing the whole schedule.

Then, after we debated this issue many different times—and I guess it went to the opposition many times, two or three times—it's been adjusted, taking Friday out of the whole proposal, because, as you know, all of us come to this Legislature from Monday to Thursday. After being here, we look forward to going back to our constituencies and dealing with our constituents, reporting to them, listening to them and trying to deal with their issues every Friday. Especially for the people who are not from Toronto, they have difficulty commuting on a regular basis.

After we adjusted this proposal to be in some kind of way family-friendly, I listened to the opposition members opposing the proposal, despite all the changes done to this proposal. I hope they're not opposing it because it's proposed by the government. But I listened to their debate, their ideas, the issues and concerns about many different issues being mentioned by the opposition leaders and then the leader of the third party when he spoke 20 or 30 minutes ago about the reason he's opposing this proposed change to the standing orders.

I don't see any logic of the whole debate and concern. He was talking about democracy and talking about people not being able to do research in the morning. I want to tell you, I know the media will love to have the news before 11 o'clock on a daily basis. When we do announcements in London, we make sure we do the news before 11 o'clock; otherwise it won't be reported on the same day.

Therefore, I think it's a good opportunity for the media to participate and also to report the news about the most important issues we deal with in the House before 11 o'clock every day. I think it's very important. I don't see any problem for the media or the leader of the third party or the opposition to be upset about. I think it's a very important structure and we should all look forward to these changes.

Also, we are here on a daily basis, as the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex said before me. It's very important, as she said, that when people ask us, "What do you do during the day? What time do you start question period and come to the House?" we say 1:30. So sometimes we struggle. What do we do from 8 o'clock in the morning to 1:30 in the afternoon, especially if we come from an area where everyone wakes up early in the morn-

ing, 7 or 8 or 9 o'clock, and they go to work from 8 to 4 or from 9 to 5?

Why do we have to go against the whole structure of traditional working days? I think that I'm very productive in the morning time. By evening time, all of us—especially after supper—get tired. You have no energy to debate the issues or add to the intelligent debate that goes on in this place. So after being exhausted all day from coming at 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning, you want to go beyond 6:30 or 7 o'clock for a debate? I think it won't be productive.

Many of the media report that the debate that goes on in this place—Madam Speaker, you are one of them. You voiced your concern about the kind of debate that goes on in this place at night, because people are exhausted. People have been here all day. They cannot add intelligent debate to the whole issue, the whole spectrum of this place.

I think it's very important for all of us. When we wake up in the morning, we are fresh and able. We can gather ourselves and our mind and our intellectual abilities to add something productive to this place. I think it's a very important issue, a very important motion, and I think all of us should support it and give it a try. I don't know why people are against trying something new.

I was looking at the research here. We're not trying to impose—we're not trying something new. This place has experienced changes more than 25 times, changes to the whole procedure of this House. So I don't think we're trying something new here. We're trying something in order to enhance the ability to debate. We're trying something to engage more members to be able to debate in this House.

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We're increasing the private members' bills time. As you know, we have 107 members in this House. According to the procedure we have right now, I cannot present my bill in this session. I have to wait until 2009 because the number is so huge and only two items are being debated every week. So I don't have a chance to present my bills within the yearly session. I have to wait another year to get the chance to present my bill. I think this change will allow me and many others in this House to get the chance and ability to present their bills, because the number—my private member's bill will be increased by 50%.

Debate time: We're talking about democracy. The leader of the third party talked about democracy because he thinks this proposed motion will go against the democratic way we've experienced for years and years in this place. I think it will not. There's more time for debate. People will get a chance to debate many different issues. Especially when you debate in the morning, you have more of an ability to debate because you are fresh and with a clear mind, instead of debating at night-time.

We can also talk about research. You can research many different items the day before. I think, in many different jurisdictions—

Mr. Michael Prue: When do you get your morning newspaper? The day before?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: No, but the newspaper or the magazine—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: It comes early.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: —comes early in the morning. By 5 or 6 o'clock, we receive all the papers, and we have the ability to go through them and read them, and we construct our instruction according to the news happening that day.

Journalists and media people work around the clock, 24 hours. They always have news. There are always issues going on around the globe. There are always issues going on in the province of Ontario. They always have the ability to gather the information and report it.

It's very important for all of us to understand that the changes might enhance the debate in this House, might enhance question period, might enhance the ability for many people to participate, and also might enhance the ability of our members to present their private members' bills. As I mentioned to you, according to the procedure we have, I have to wait until 2009 to present my private member's bill. It's not good for me, but it's what happened around the schedule. We have to take times, and if we present two a week, according to the schedule, I cannot present mine until 2009. When we have the changes, I think it will increase the time for all of us to have a chance to present private members' bills. I think it's a very good and important initiative.

We have to change our way of thinking. We cannot go on and on and on as we did in the past for many years, because everything changes. The technology changes. Now we live in Internet times. We live in a time of advanced communication where technology can wire the information to us within less than a second. I remember when I started here and we didn't have a way to communicate with outside of this place. Now we have BlackBerries that can receive information in a second. We can refresh our information every second.

Technology is advancing and our ability to communicate with others is advancing. According to the advance of technology and the way we communicate with others, I think the whole tradition and the whole procedure in this place should change—according to the change in technology and communications. That's why I'm supporting this. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I approach this debate with some degree of disappointment because with this motion, we see once again the power of the Premier's office usurping the authority of elected members of provincial Parliament.

With this motion, we see once again the will of the people, as articulated by their elected representatives in this place, supplanted by the will of unelected, anonymous but increasingly powerful operators in the Premier's office. This should be a troubling trend for all members because it strikes at the very heart of our parliamentary democracy.

That system of government, which has served us so well, which is superior to all others in the world and has

stood the test of time, is gradually being eroded in this place. It's being replaced by a more autocratic form of government which lacks legitimacy because its principal players have been elected to no public office whatsoever and probably couldn't get elected if they tried.

This motion, which the government House leader on Monday told us was part of an effort to make the Legislature more family-friendly, does nothing of the sort. As my friend the member for Kitchener–Waterloo said on Monday, serving as a member of the Legislative Assembly is not, and never will be, particularly family-friendly. The very nature of our responsibilities and the public expectations and demands on our time mean long hours on the job and frequent, and often unhappy, absences from home for most of us. I'm not complaining about this because I feel very privileged to serve as a member of provincial Parliament and I continue to wish to serve my communities in this capacity, as I have for many years now. However, I must acknowledge that my continued service in the Legislature implies time spent away from family, which I can never get back. My family support, especially from my wife Lisa, enables me to continue this service; without it, I would not be here. I find that, by and large, my constituents are very understanding when I tell them that I can't attend an event because of a family commitment.

Most of us, Madam Speaker, as you know very well, work very, very long hours most of the time. For example, yesterday morning I was home in Fergus. I got up, had breakfast with my family before they went to school, and I left for Queen's Park at 10 to 8 in the morning. I arrived here at Queen's Park at about five minutes past 10, five minutes late for our caucus meeting because of the traffic. Our caucus meeting went on for several hours, as it tends to do. I had time for a 10-minute walk during the lunch hour and then I worked in my office until the House began sitting at 1:30 p.m. I was in the House for question period, as I normally am, and I took the chair at 3:30 as one of the presiding officers. We sat until 6:10 p.m. I then went back to my office, called home, dropped in at the Niagara reception for some hors d'oeuvres, which was the only dinner that I had, and took the chair again at 6:45 p.m. We sat until about 9:15 and then I went back to my office and made phone calls until about 10 p.m. That was my day—about 14 hours. I know that for most members this is not unusual.

This morning, I rose at 6 a.m. and drove to Burlington for a breakfast event hosted by the regional chair of Halton, featuring Justin Trudeau as the guest speaker. I drove back to Queen's Park and have been working here ever since, and I have to plan to be here at least until 9:30 tonight because I have House duty and, of course, the House is sitting tonight.

This account is intended to demonstrate nothing more than two random days as an MPP. Again, I'm not complaining, because I feel privileged to be here, but I must say, I took great offence to the Premier's statements of last week, which implied that MPPs only work when we're in the chamber. Those comments were offensive to every member of this House. If the Premier really believes this, it must be based on his own personal experience, which would seem to suggest that he thinks he does nothing important or he's not working unless he's in this chamber. If that's the case, Ontario is in worse trouble than we in this House ever thought possible. There would have been a simpler way of beginning to effectively address the concerns of MPPs who need to balance family and work, as we all do.

The central problem is the government's routine use of unnecessary night sittings. If today, we, as a Legislature, had simply turned down the government's daily motion for night sittings, as we could have done, would the government have collapsed? Would an election have been triggered? Would someone have had to resign? Of course, the answer to all these questions is no. We just would have not sat tonight. There would have been a panicked emergency meeting in the Premier's office and they would have scurried around, trying to decide what to do, but we would have sent a message that the government relies on the day-to-day assent of the Legislature as a whole, opposition members and government backbenchers alike. We would have said that that assent cannot be taken for granted.

It's my understanding that a few years ago the Yukon Legislative Assembly solved this problem in one stroke by ending the day's sittings every day at 5:30 p.m., initiated and supported by the women MLAs from all parties. This reform has worked, giving Yukon MLAs the option of spending more evenings with their families when their work is done at the end of the day. We could do that here, too.

I've listened to the speeches given by the government members during the course of this debate, especially those who were elected for the first time in 2003 and 2007. Many members appear to support this motion because they think it will end night sittings. I want to remind them that during the 35th Parliament, my first and formative years in this place, from 1990-95, the House almost never sat nights, except in the final two weeks of a legislative sitting, typically in June and December. The government, in the end, always got its business completed.

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In the evenings, the members close enough to home went home. Those of us from outside Toronto who had to stay in the city would occasionally get together for a game of euchre in the caucus office, if we weren't working late. Friendships were forged, often across party lines, based on our common experience of serving the people of Ontario. There is no reason I know of that this kind of collegiality couldn't experience a rebirth in 2008 if we simply ended the night sittings.

In her remarks on Monday in this debate, my colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, our party's House leader, said that the government's motion fails the twin litmus tests of "enhancing the accountability of the government to the Legislature and also improving the effective and efficient functioning of the Legislature." I

wholeheartedly agree. This surely is the most important aspect of this whole debate, not how the standing order changes affect any individual MPP's current scheduling routine today.

To this point in the debate, the government House leader has yet to establish that this motion enhances the accountability of the government to the Legislature or improves the effective and efficient functioning of the Legislature. The government House leader is a lawyer, but on Monday when he spoke to this House he would not have convinced any judge that his motion meets these objectives.

Yesterday, the legislative press gallery intervened in this debate in a highly unusual but completely appropriate manner. Unanimously, they voted to tell the government that this motion is not in the public interest and makes it more difficult for them to perform their vital role, which is to explain and interpret the goings-on here for readers and viewers, the voters of Ontario.

I have the letter and I need to read it into the record because apparently some government members have not seen it. It's addressed to the Premier of Ontario and the government House leader:

"At the annual general meeting of the Queen's Park press gallery today, members voted unanimously to raise concerns about the government's proposed new legislative calendar.

"Gallery members have grave misgivings the new schedule would limit access to cabinet ministers and the Premier by reporters in the following ways:

"(1) The fact that post-question-period scrums would take place shortly before noon would make it difficult, if not impossible, for broadcast reporters to attend while they are filing for noon newscasts or doing live hits at noon.

"This creates an unacceptable gap in access between broadcast and print reporters.

"(2) On cabinet and caucus days, reporters now have two opportunities to scrum ministers, in the morning and again in the afternoon following question period. The new schedule would cut this access in half.

"The gallery considers that any reduction in access would undermine the function of a free press at Queen's Park.

"(3) Losing the access to ministers after question period in the afternoons makes it more difficult for reporters to get reaction to news stories breaking later in the day.

"We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with you."

It's signed by the president of the Queen's Park press gallery.

Of course, when this letter was publicized yesterday in question period, the government House leader was flippant, derisive and made light of the concerns of the press gallery. I'm sure that he will, at some point in the future, regret his performance in the House yesterday.

Before I close, I want to point out the fact that this motion completely overlooks the importance of standing committees of this Legislature. The committees weren't even an afterthought in this discussion. Their function has been absolutely ignored. Yet the committees are the formal mechanism whereby the public has a direct opportunity to address members of the Legislature, of all parties, through public hearings, providing this crucial link between the elected and the electors. This again demonstrates the government's motion contradicting the basis of parliamentary democracy.

When this debate concludes, as MPPs we have a choice—indeed we have a responsibility—to defend parliamentary democracy and send the government House leader back to the drawing board. If this motion fails, the government won't fall. In fact, the government has no mandate to change these standing orders. There was no commitment in the Liberal Party's platform during the election campaign to do this. Liberal candidates, I dare say, didn't run on this as part of their agenda. Most of them, I suspect, don't like these changes any more than we do on this side of the House.

Let's hope that the Liberal members understand the full extent of the power that they have to influence this debate. Let's hope that they give serious consideration to what they are hearing in this House with respect to this discussion, because they have it within their power to withdraw their support from the government on this measure. If they don't show up for the vote or if they sit in their places and abstain on this vote, we have a chance of going back to ensuring that parliamentary democracy is upheld and that the government House leader has a second opportunity to deal with this matter.

Of course, we as an opposition party would be more than prepared to participate in that discussion. We believe that it should be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly so as to ensure that all members of this House have the opportunity to do so.

I want to add one additional thought, and it's something that I said many times when our party was in power to anyone who would listen, when we were contemplating changes to the standing orders. Just remember that some day your party will be in opposition and you may very well regret the consequences of the standing order changes that look so tempting today.

Mr. Michael Prue: I was called in to this debate. I hadn't anticipated actually having to speak to the motion until tomorrow or the subsequent hearing. But there are many things that I would like to say. I've listened intently to the debate, both here in the last hour or so and before that on the television as other people were standing up and speaking. It's routine, I think, in this place for government members to stand up and laud a bill which I think, quite honestly, is not well understood.

It harkens back to a time in my youth when I was, of course, much younger, and I considered myself quite an expert in terms of rules of order. In fact, I taught rules of order in the university, I taught them to people on student councils, I taught them to people who were holding public meetings, and in fact, I taught them for the union the Public Service Alliance of Canada, in some of their

courses, so that people would understand how to interject in a debate, how to have themselves heard, how the democratic process worked, how they would have an opportunity to stand up in a convention or just in a meeting and use the rules of order in order to get their thought process out and onto the record.

I believed with all my heart in those days—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: Sorry. I'm having a hard time hearing myself here with the conversation. If you would be so kind, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I please ask that the members keep the side conversations down to a respectful level. I can't hear the member speaking. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I believed with all my heart that this was part of the democratic process, that people learned the rules and there were rules of order in order to allow free and open debate to take place. As I said, I taught those principles, and I taught them throughout the whole period of time that I was involved in the trade union movement.

It was upon, however, my election to the East York council in 1988 that my eyes were opened to the real purpose of the rules of order. The real purpose was not, as I had always understood, to encourage and to allow open debate. It was not to extend or to time-frame how long that debate would take place. I was asked a question by the clerk at the borough of East York when we first got there—what we thought the purpose of the rules of order were, why we have these rules of order in place. Of course, thinking myself somewhat the expert who had taught them for many years, I instantly said, "To allow for debate, to make sure that there was debate." He looked at me sternly and told me I was wrong.

You can imagine my shock when he told me I was wrong, and he went on to quote probably the all-time expert on parliamentary rules and procedure going back centuries. It was a guy called Bourinot. He quoted Bourinot and he did so brilliantly. He said that the purpose of the rules and procedures was to prevent the tyranny of the majority from inflicting its will upon the minority. That may sound very arcane and very difficult, but it was a very simple process. The rules exist to allow that the minority has a chance to be heard and to voice its objections. He went on to explain, quite frankly, that it was easy for the majority, who had the votes, who were in control of the situation, to impose their will at the end of the debate. That's what happens here in this Legislature each and every day on each and every vote. All the government members stand up and vote for every single government bill, and sometimes some of the opposition members will vote with the government, but usually not. The government, at the end of the day, will get their bill passed.

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But the importance of this Legislature is not for the government to pass its bill. The importance of the Legislature and of the rules of procedure is to allow the minority to be heard. That's the importance of all of this. Anything that takes away the minority's right to be heard, even in a small way, diminishes the greatness of our parliamentary tradition. I owe a great deal to Bill Alexander for pointing that out to me. I have tried throughout my 20 years as an elected politician at the municipal level and then later at the provincial level to always make it possible for everyone to be heard, even those people whose views were different from my own, even from the minorities, because they had a right to be heard and a right to be considered.

I look at this motion and I look to it in terms not of whether it's going to speed up the process, not whether the government's going to get its bills through faster, not whether there's 6.5 hours of debate time or whether it's all on one day or another day. I look upon it as to how this is going to affect the opposition in getting its point of view across, in being able to challenge, in order to make the opposition do its job properly.

When I look at that, I have to tell you, I believe this motion fails. It fails in several regards, and I'm going to deal with them, but the one fundamental place where it fails is around the issue of question period.

Now, some of us wonder, I think, why we come here some days, with the bickering back and forth. We wonder what question period is about. We wonder whether the debate that is taking place here tonight may be important, or as important or less important. But in every Legislature in the world that follows British parliamentary tradition, all of them have question period, and question period is to hold the government to account.

I think others may have spoken of this, but we have here from Professor White, department of political science, the University of Toronto, a three-page letter, and I'd just like to quote a couple of paragraphs, because I honestly believe they are essential to what is happening here today.

After establishing his credentials as being a non-party person, having no formal or informal associations with any parties, having lectured Liberals at their conventions, having lectured Conservatives at their conventions, and having provided this letter to the New Democratic Party—that he is, above all, an academic and not a person who belongs to a particular political point of view—he writes:

"Most of the proposed changes strike me as either positive or at least open to debate as to their advisability. However, I am firmly of the view that the proposal to move question period into the morning represents a serious and entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the assembly in performing one of its key functions, holding the government to account."

Opposition members—and I have to explain this to my constituents all the time—don't put forward bills, except maybe private members' bills. They don't drive a government agenda. They are here to react, they are here to criticize, hopefully in a helpful way, and they are here to ensure that the tyranny of the majority does not always

hold sway, that there is a profound check and balance against that tyranny.

I think what Professor White is trying to say is that the role we have to play will be diminished, and I am in agreement. He goes on, on the second page, to write:

"Effective questions require planning, research and reflection. This is difficult enough when question period occurs in the early afternoon, but would be all but impossible for a morning question period. It takes time to find and process the facts, to locate and contact experts inside and outside government, to solicit information and opinion from people and organizations affected by government and to organize this material into a coherent question period strategy. Some of this could be done the day before but much of it cannot. Question period's effectiveness and its attraction to the media depends heavily on immediacy."

I listened to some of the speakers on the government side standing up and saying this is okay, there's still going to be debate and it doesn't matter what time it takes place; they were opposed to the rules, but now that several modifications have been made to the rule changes, they're now very happy. But I want to tell the members, particularly the members of the government who have never sat anywhere except on the government side of this House, that you have to understand the difficulties inherent in putting a meaningful question before one of the members of cabinet. It is a difficult process that begins very early in the morning.

I am one of those who arrive here generally before 8 o'clock each and every day. I arrive here just before the press clippings come. I wait for the press clippings to arrive at my door, I greet the deliverer if I'm here, say hello in the morning, look at the press clippings and determine what is in the news that day. The person who prepares the press clippings gets here, I understand, before 6 o'clock and is required to read the newspapers and to make photocopies and produce hundreds and hundreds of press clippings packages, which are delivered throughout this building. That person starts at 6 o'clock in the morning. He or she starts at 6 o'clock in the morning, and there may be more than one; I've never gone up to see how many are actually involved in that. But for it to be at my door, it's at 8 o'clock.

At 8 o'clock I read them and at 9 o'clock we go—the NDP, at least; I think in the Conservative Party as well—to a meeting. We call it a question period meeting. We discuss among our colleagues what potentially will be asked that day. We lobby for questions in particular places. That's usually resolved around 9:30 or quarter to 10. I'm seeing the minister over there shaking his head because he's been in opposition too. That's the way it works. At about quarter to 10 everything is determined—the question that's likely to be asked—and then it's turned over to the researchers. The researchers take the raw data contained in the newspapers and other things and they go out and start contacting experts, witnesses and people who are concerned about it. Then the questions are usually finalized, formalized and put back on my desk, if I am one of the questioners, around noon—noon to 1 o'clock. I get the question and look at it and, as the member asking the question, I make revisions to it to make sure that I'm happy with it. And at 1:30 we stand up here and we ask the question. What is going to happen when question period is at 10:45? Can the same process be used that's been used here for 150 years?

The newspapers are not going to be delivered to Queen's Park any earlier than 6 o'clock. The researcher who researches them is going to research them and probably deliver them to my door at 8, although that poor researcher may have to be in here at 5:30 or 5—I don't know whether too many newspapers arrive before that—and is going to have to put it on my desk. The caucus staff is going to have to be here upon the arrival at 8 o'clock, if not before, and is going to have to sit down and come up with a question or group of questions and the entire caucus is going to have to be there. I don't mind being there if it's 8 o'clock. But the difficulty arises when the 45 minutes is spent until about quarter to 9 or 9 o'clock to arrive at what kind of questions you're going to ask. You then have a period of time of approximately an hour or an hour and a half to develop the questions, look at your experts and try to make some rational case out of it to come into the House and ask the question.

I will tell you what's going to happen—the same thing that the professor also warned us about in his letter, and he writes:

"Second, when I worked at Queen's Park, the House sat on Friday mornings and question period began at 10 a.m. The proportion of silly, pointless questions was high and the proportion of substantial questions low; indeed, this was one of the reasons that Friday morning sittings were abandoned."

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If the government expects the opposition to do its job—or maybe they are hoping we don't do our job—then let's all do this at 10 o'clock in the morning or 10:45 in the morning, to make sure that there's no research, to make sure that the staff hasn't had a chance to properly digest the news of the night before or to call up people who don't start work until 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock in the morning to get advice as to the propriety of the question. Let's have them all shoved around and let's have members come to the office and ask the same kind of silly, pointless questions that were asked on those Friday mornings in this Legislature before the practice was abandoned. That is the reality of what is going to happen.

I'm not going to argue with government members whether 9 to 6 is a good thing. I think 9 to 6 is a great thing. I'm not going to argue that night sittings are useless because I've sat in this place and seen the calibre of debate, which descends hugely after 6:45 on many occasions. I'm not going to argue that people don't go out to some of the receptions and come back and give speeches that are a little different than they may have given in the afternoon. I'm not going to argue, "Let's not stop at 6." I think stopping at 6 is a great thing. I'm going to vote to stop at 6.

Mr. Peter Kormos: At 6:30.

Mr. Michael Prue: Even 6:30, I don't care; some time reasonable. But what I am going to ask you to do is to reconsider the placing of question period at 10:45. It will mean a great deal, not only to the opposition in fulfilling its duty but I would suggest it will also mean a great deal to some of the cabinet ministers who have to reply. I've not heard this from anyone but I'm just saying that cabinet ministers also have to be briefed. The cabinet ministers are also briefed from the morning news on what to expect.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Some are better briefed than others.

Mr. Michael Prue: Some are better briefed than others, but they also will have to be briefed. How can they anticipate or how can their staff anticipate the questions? They get the same press clippings we do. They have to do the same kind of research to find out if it's something the cabinet minister may not have been aware of. They're going to have to stand up and defend a policy that they may not be fully aware of at 10:45 in the morning, and I'm sure that's going to make for some fun in here. I'm not sure that the government backbenchers who are standing up lauding this process are thinking carefully about their colleagues who have to field these questions. I think maybe they want to see some of the sport of all this, because they will be looking over there and saying, "Look at that cabinet minister squirm. Look at that cabinet minister not able to answer that question. Maybe that cabinet minister won't be there long. Maybe I can aspire to that position."

I have a really difficult time. I've got three minutes left. I just want to talk about a couple of other points.

If the government sees fit to move question period to the afternoon, I think this whole debate will just—

Mr. Peter Kormos: We can stop it right now.

Mr. Michael Prue: I think it'll stop right now. I think everyone else in this room, everyone on this side of the House, will concede that 9 to 6 is a good thing, that there are some flaws in it but we'll work on the flaws. We can change a few things around, but the really big issue is question period, for the opposition and I dare say for cabinet ministers who are going to have an increasingly difficult time answering pointed questions and maybe ones that aren't very well researched.

I have the whole issue about committees too, and this has been canvassed a little. I looked at this new schedule and I don't know when we're going to hold committees. Have any people on the government side thought about when we're going to hold committees? Right now we hold committees primarily in the mornings when there is nothing going on in the House.

Mr. Peter Kormos: They haven't amended the standing orders with respect to committees.

Mr. Michael Prue: There have been no amendments to the standing orders in terms of committees, so I don't know when they're going to meet. It appears to me that if the committees stay exactly where they are without an amendment to the standing orders, we will be holding committee hearings during question period. It will mean that people will have a choice of either being in the House to listen to the questions and understanding what is happening or they will have to be in committee. The committees will have a very hard time having people show up. There will be difficulty for quorum.

I know on my committee today, we went until nine minutes after 10 until we got quorum. We came within one minute—

Mr. Peter Kormos: The Liberals didn't show up?

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes. Unfortunately, we came within one minute of having to cancel the meeting. The two deputants in regulations and private bills had come, one from Barrie and the other from Ottawa. We almost had to cancel on them.

I can only see this happening worse when the committees are during question period, when they're during voting periods. This has not been amended. I don't know when we're going to hold them, other than times when the House is in session. We deal with that now in the afternoon on some occasions, but it's after question period, it's after petitions, and it allows for a couple of hours. This is very dangerous. This government is going headlong into this and there has been no thought process on how the committees are going to operate.

In my last 30 seconds I want to talk a little bit about the ability of people to attend. It's going to make no never mind for people to attend question period if you live in Toronto. But I challenge somebody who wants to come down from Ottawa or somebody who wants to come from Sault Ste. Marie. They're going to have to come down the night before, with all the inherent expense—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Or from Kenora.

Mr. Michael Prue: —or from Kenora, from wherever, with all the inherent expense—taxies, hotel bills and everything—to participate. The level of participation outside of Toronto will decline enormously.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I will be sharing my time this afternoon with the member for Eglinton–Lawrence. This is a very important debate on this motion because it goes to the heart of how this place functions in the province of Ontario and how we must be accountable, not only the members of the opposition, but the government of the day, regardless of political stripe.

I listened with interest to the leader of the third party this afternoon. He talked about this being bad for democracy and bad for accountability. I want to remind people that the leader of the third party today was the Attorney General in a government from 1990 to 1995 that barely sat in the last year of that mandate. To come here and talk about accountability, when he was a senior member of a government that virtually did not sit in the last year of their mandate, goes to the heart of what is sometimes wrong with this place. People forget about that history and forget about accountability when they have the privilege of being in government.

This is a very serious matter and in the next couple of weeks I will take the opportunity—one of my good

friends in Peterborough is a former Speaker here, the Honourable John Turner. Mr. Turner was a Progressive Conservative member here from 1975 to 1977 and again from 1981 to 1987. He had the great privilege of being Speaker from 1981 to 1985. From time to time, I take the opportunity to discuss changes that happen with Mr. Turner and I will be seeking out his view on this reform package because he's a man with great experience. He had a wonderful reputation when he was here, both as a member of government and in his time as Speaker.

I don't particularly share the concern that moving question period to the morning will have less accountability. In fact, I think in many ways it will have more accountability. There will be a question period starting at 10:45 in the morning. There will be the traditional scrum after question period concludes. Then there will be an opportunity, I think more hours throughout the day, to hold the government to the fire, which is a term that the opposition uses quite frequently. So from that perspective, I think it might enhance accountability.

The other issue is that question period here at Queen's Park is longer than any other Parliament within the British Commonwealth. It's important that we have a very full question period, when the government of the day, the ministers of the crown, are accountable for what's happening in government.

I find the research question interesting, too. I've watched Westminster in terms of their question period. In that particular forum, of course, their questions are written, so there's advance notice. In that forum, the opposition and the third party—there are three parties in Westminster—obviously do their homework, in terms of doing the preparatory work that is necessary to provide those questions, in an advanced state. So to say that you can't get that work done—it will certainly present some challenges in terms of how one is going to prepare for this new question period, but I do believe it will address accountability.

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The other question is, this is just a pilot project. The government House leader, the Honourable Michael Bryant, had provided in writing notification to the official opposition and the third party way back in February of this year to start up a process to look at parliamentary reform and the operations of this House. In fact, I do want to stress to the public listening this afternoon that this is a pilot project. There will be opportunity to see the changes put in place, to see how they work, and to get feedback on how it might be changed going down the road.

One of the things—and this is just a personal view of mine. One of the things I think we need to adopt here in Ontario is the conference mechanism that is used in the United States Congress and Senate, where in fact the parties come together in that particular situation, where there are only two parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, they look at a variety of bills, and they say, "Yes, we have a consensus on these particular bills, so we're prepared to fast-track these bills through both the American Senate and the House of Representatives under the conference mechanism." What that allows for is the opportunity to bring back the filibuster when there is a piece of legislation in the American Congress that is particularly contentious, when members have an unlimited time to speak.

If you look at the history of this great Parliament, there have been some very interesting filibusters on a whole variety of issues. I happen to think that sometimes that enhances democracy, when you can have that opportunity to really discuss issues of importance.

You can go back to certainly the mid-1960s, when the Attorney General of the day, Fred Cass, brought forward a rather contentious police bill. The opposition at that time of course used mechanisms at their disposal to derail that piece of legislation. In fact, the Attorney General of the day under Premier Roberts had to resign. So as a government member, I think it's important that we make sure there are an extensive number of opportunities for the opposition to hold the government accountable. That's what a healthy democracy is all about. I don't see these particular items that the government House leader, Michael Bryant, has brought forward at this time as diminishing the role of the opposition.

I want to say that I think there are a number of items in here that will allow the opposition to do its job in terms of accountability, such as extending the number of hours of debate. I think there is an opportunity, as we move forward with this reform package, to have some discussion about how committees operate. I think there is a real opportunity, again, to enhance the role of committees. Committees do wonderful work reviewing legislation, but I think there is an opportunity to look at the function of committees. But you have to make a start. The motion that has been proposed by the House leader is indeed a start to having a fulsome discussion about how this place operates.

You know, I'm struck, when I'm at home in Peterborough, by the number of people who actually do pay attention to what goes on here. You've often heard the term "inside baseball" used, and I don't think, often, that that's a fair way to describe the viewing public who take the time, each and every day, often, to tune in. They take advantage of local cable networks that display the proceedings of the House. I know as a former city councillor I was always struck by the people who watched city council in Peterborough to get insight on the happenings of the day, issues that are involving them, and I think that's appropriate to keep a democracy healthy. Again, I want to stress that it is a pilot project.

I've had my time, and I'll allow the member from Eglinton–Lawrence—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. The member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to say that the member from Peterborough really has his feet on the ground. He has his heart in Peterborough. He loves his city. He loves the people he represents and you can see it every day that he speaks, that he reminds us of that. I think he represents a

lot of the members here in their compassion and connection with the people they represent.

Sometimes, those of us who sit here and have sat here for a number of years forget that all of us are here because of that connection with our community. We sometimes undermine our own connections because we at times trivialize the things that we do as MPPs. That's why I think that this discussion on this motion gives us an opportunity to reflect on how many good things we can do in this Legislature and how to best do those good things.

Like many of us here on both sides of the House, there are a number of us who are skeptical about any change. We ask the question, "Why does it make it any better for the people we are trying to serve?" I think that a lot of us on the government side have asked a number of good, tough questions to see how this new proposal would work.

I certainly don't believe there is any perfect parliamentary legislative system. You go anywhere in the British democracies, in the British parliamentary system, and there is a wide range of opinions on which is best. But I think in putting forward these reform motions, there's an opportunity to reflect on what we do here and maybe to find ways of making some of the processes better.

Certainly, we don't expect that everyone will agree with all the changes proposed, but generally speaking, many of the members have said quite candidly that they agree with almost everything except the timing of question period. That seems to be the big stickler. I can't say 100% that I think it's the perfect time for having question period, but there is an opportunity for us to look at this change over the next number of months and to see if it is working and if there can be suggested changes and improvements.

It is totally different, because I was reflecting on sitting here through—and the member from Trinity–Spadina will recall—those days of Bill 26, when the dramatic, unprecedented, draconian changes were made to every aspect of government, and there was no motion. There was no debate. It was brought in in the middle of the night, shoved down our throats, and basically, the attitude was "my way or the highway."

The ironic thing is that my good friends opposite were there on this side at that time when those draconian changes came forward. They never spoke out and even whispered an objection at that time. They never even got an opportunity like we have to at least debate this motion.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: They all drank the Kool-Aid, as my good friend from Oshawa said. He knows that. They drank gallons of the Mike Harris Kool-Aid on all this stuff.

But it was heavy. It was heavy-duty, draconian downloading of legislative change. This is in no way even close to the draconian changes made then.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: You know that, member from Trinity–Spadina. It's nowhere near the draconian days; you know that.

This is a modest, moderate attempt to make changes. I'm not saying they're perfect, but at least let's look at them. I will hopefully be discussing some of these and see how they work. Some may be good, some may be bad, but at least it's a reasonable attempt to change that deserves a good evaluation period.

I think that every number of years we have to maybe look at making adjustments. We can't always maintain the status quo totally. Some adjustments may be necessary, and that's what this is about. So I think it's an opportunity for us to maybe revitalize ourselves a bit, look at these changes, and come back in a number of months and see if they're working. Then we'll see.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. It being 6 o'clock, I declare this House adjourned until 6:45 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 23 April 2008

Mercredi 23 avril 2008

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Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 23 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 23 avril 2008

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHRISTOPHER'S LAW (SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY) AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI CHRISTOPHER SUR LE REGISTRE DES DÉLINQUANTS SEXUELS

Mr. Bartolucci moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 16, An Act to amend Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000 / Projet de loi 16, Loi modifiant la Loi Christopher de 2000 sur le registre des délinquants sexuels.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bartolucci has moved third reading of Bill 16. Mr. Bartolucci?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Bill 16, Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry) Amendment Act, 2008, received first reading on December 11, 2007, and second reading on April 2, 2008.

Christopher's Law is one tool for helping to secure the protection of our community. It is based on the simple proposition that if police know the whereabouts of all convicted sex offenders in the community, they are better able to identify potential threats and can better focus their investigation into actual crimes.

Christopher's Law requires sex offenders convicted of criteria sex offences to register with the police service in their area of residence. This act has proven very helpful to police in keeping track of sex offenders in the community, conducting investigations into sex crimes and, in some cases, preventing these crimes.

Ontario is the first and remains the only province in Canada to have its own sex offender registry. We are proud of that distinction. However, as an example to the rest of the country, it imposes on us a responsibility to ensure the registry works as well as it possibly can and achieves all it sets out to do.

Police across Ontario rely on the information in the registry to help them investigate and solve cases involving sexual offences. That is why they access the registry almost 500 times per day. We need to assure our police officers and the communities they serve that the information on which they rely to help protect the public is as complete, accurate and up to date as possible.

For this reason, it is important that we maintain a registry that is state of the art. It is important that we build on the lessons we've learned in pioneering the sex offender registry in Canada and make improvements where necessary. Bill 16 is the outcome of that effort.

Ontario's Auditor General reviewed the registry in carrying out his value-for-money audit. He found that there were weaknesses in the registry. He offered recommendations. I'm very, very proud to say that we are acting on each of the recommendations the Auditor General has made.

I want to thank every member on both sides of the House for the very, very professional way that we've dealt with the Provincial Auditor's report, the way we've dealt with this particular bill. At the end of the day, we are going to have a much stronger bill in effect.

We have responded to the recommendations of the Auditor General by making the required changes to our processes to make the registry more effective and make it an even better tool for our law enforcement partners.

1850

This is a government bill, but everyone in this House has ensured that this happens, so I want to thank the members on both sides of the House for making that happen so quickly. It is an important piece of legislation. We've handled it in a very, very timely way, in a way that reflects the importance of this legislation.

I also want to thank my parliamentary assistant for the hard work that he's put into this. And I want to thank, in a very, very special way, Jim and Anna Stephenson, the parents of Christopher, for their advice, their guidance and their trust in all of us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity this evening to speak briefly to third reading of Bill 16, An Act to amend Christopher's Law. I want to indicate that our party's critic for this responsibility, the member for Simcoe North, unfortunately couldn't be here for this debate, but he wanted me to put a few comments on the record on his behalf.

Certainly, our caucus will be supporting this bill. As the substantial debate took place at second reading, I guess there isn't need for a substantial debate tonight on a bill that, hopefully, will be passed unanimously by the House.

Our party is very proud of the work that we did while in government to establish the first sex offender registry in Canada. The work that was done by the member for Leeds–Grenville, the former Solicitor General David Tsubouchi and the former Solicitor General David Turnbull, I believe, was important work which laid the foundation upon which the sex offender registry was established.

I want to compliment the current Minister of Community Safety for bringing forward this bill and for the very forthright manner in which he has addressed head-on the observations of the auditor. He didn't ignore the concerns that were expressed by the auditor; he acknowledged them and he addressed them, and I think that's the appropriate course of action for the government.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill tonight. We will be supporting it. We look forward to further opportunities to represent the public interest with respect to this issue, going forward.

Mr. Peter Kormos: New Democrats support this bill. We're going to be supporting it this evening, inevitably, when it goes to a vote.

I do want folks to note that the member for St. Catharines, the Minister of Transportation, is still sitting in his seat in the chamber. I was in here at 8:30 this morning to get some papers out of my desk that I wanted to work on and Jim Bradley was there in his seat. I came back around 11:30—there was a group of school kids touring, and I wanted to drop in and say hi—Jim Bradley was in his seat. And here we are, just shy of 7 o'clock tonight, and Bradley's still in his seat. He will be here Friday, I'm sure. His folks should know how hard he works for them in this chamber, in that very seat, so close to the Speaker. At some point, the staff will be dimming the lights, and Mr. Bradley may feel compelled to retire for the day.

Look, this is very, very serious stuff. This is deadly stuff because—as we learned during the process of dealing with the initial legislation and then, once again, reminding ourselves while contemplating this amendment—at the end of the day, we're talking about kids who get abducted by sexual predators. We talked very clearly about the life expectancy of those kids. Their life expectancy is very short. You've got two time frames: the one-hour time frame and the 24-hour time frame. Once you've exhausted the 24-hour time frame, the chilling reality is that, more often than not, one's fortunate to find the corpse. So, it's imperative that police officers across this province have all the tools, all the resources that we can possibly provide them to act quickly to locate kids who are the victims of sexual predators.

Equally important—and I don't want to try to classify, as one judge notoriously did quite a few years ago, these types of offences on any sort of scale—but similarly, in the case of rapists. We saw the regrettable consequences here in the city of Toronto, where a community wasn't advised of the presence of a serial rapist in that community. It was the notorious, famous Jane Doe case, where there was a significant settlement by the Toronto Police Services Board. They acknowledged their error in failing to notify the community so that in that community women could protect themselves. I believe that communities, women and parents have a right to protect themselves and their children from sexual predators.

Now, this is not a disclosure law like exists in some American jurisdictions. The sex offender registry isn't available to the public. One of its frailties is the obvious incompleteness of it because of the disconnect between federal institutions, like penitentiaries, and other provinces and the province of Ontario.

At the end of the day, in many respects, this law is not a punishment, because that of course wouldn't be within the capacity of the provincial Legislature, but it's an expression of our repugnance about this type of crime. It is a scarlet letter law in so many respects. In the course of its maturation—and let's understand that this isn't a response to all of the concerns of the Auditor General, because not all of the concerns of the Auditor General can be resolved legislatively. As the registry matures, one would hope that it becomes complete and accurate so that police forces, police officers, can rely upon it absolutely.

I also want to raise this: Let's understand that the persons who report upon their release from custody are people doing provincial time. They have sentences of two years less a day and lower. People serving penitentiary time aren't reported by the penitentiary. They're still required to report, but aren't reported by the penitentiary. There are a whole lot of sexual offenders serving provincial sentences. That means that they're going to get out sooner rather than later. Some types of sexual disorders, like pedophilia, are incredibly difficult to treat. The likelihood of effective treatment is minimal.

So I suspect—and I want to very briefly say—that we've got to focus on the types of sentences our courts give sexual offenders. I am an advocate of sentencing that's proportionate to the offence, but I believe, and I tell you that New Democrats here in this chamber believe, that there is a certain class of sexual offenders who pose such a significant danger to the community that they should never be functioning unsupervised in the community, and some should never be released back into the community in a full and free way.

As I indicated on second reading, part of me says you either have very short sentences to tune people up, specific deterrents, or you have very long sentences to protect the public. I believe there are a whole lot of sentencing cases of sexual offenders, especially as they apply to children and women, where issues of specific deterrents, general deterrents and rehabilitation have to recede in favour of simple protection of the public.

I also believe—and the John Howard Society has articulated this position very effectively—that when we're talking about offenders who at some point are going to be released back into the community, we've got to reinvest and invest more in community-based treatment and residential programs. It does us no good to have sex offenders moving into low-priced motels that just happen to be two blocks away from an elementary school

or a public pool or a park or the lakeshore here in Toronto. It's no good whatsoever. We have to focus very much on rebuilding community-based treatment and residential services. I'll quote Graham Stewart: "What has been found to be effective is follow-up support and counselling." I don't say this in a liberal, bleeding-heart way—fluffy, pat the sex offender on the head. I'm talking about those sex offenders who are back in the community. We are doing our community, our kids, our spouses, our partners, our mothers and sisters a disservice by not addressing that.

I suspect that this debate's going to end reasonably soon. We are supporting this legislation.

Finally, I do want to note the importance of the committee process and how it's illustrated by this bill. This bill, drafted in all good sincerity by drafting people and reviewed by civil servants and by political staff, nonetheless needed 14 amendments. It's not a lengthy bill—five pages. It needed 14 amendments to correct oversights. So let's just keep that in mind, because you also know that I'm inclined to be a member here who says that all bills should go to committee. All bills should be subject to public declaration of their committee hearing because it enables all of us to make a contribution to the process of correcting any oversights or errors, and I'll leave it at that with respect to this bill.

I also want to commend once again the parliamentary assistant. I told him this at the end of the committee hearings. Isn't it remarkable how the parliamentary assistants inevitably do all the heavy lifting, but when it's time for the spotlight and the glory, it's the minister who elbows the parliamentary assistant aside and takes the credit. I tell you, I watched the member for Ottawa Centre, Yasir Naqvi. In the pursuit of his first bill as a parliamentary assistant, he performed diligently. I tell you, he didn't deviate from the text that he was provided, and that's the sign a good parliamentary assistant, no two ways about it. He did an exemplary job on behalf of his ministry. I will be reminding him, I'm sure once again—I suspect the next bill will be the zoo bill, the animal protection bill. Once again I suspect the PA will be doing the heavy lifting. The minister is there to take credit; of course, when there's an embarrassing failure, it's the parliamentary assistant who is thrust in front of the scrum outside the chamber. I suspect that the member for Ottawa Centre, Yasir Naqvi, and I will be spending more time together in committee on that one than we did on this one. I suspect he will prove himself to be capable once again.

Thank you kindly, Speaker. I don't know what other orders the government is going to call tonight. We're here until 9:30. I'm looking forward to the next order the government is going to call. God forbid there should be a motion for adjournment. After all, we're here to work, aren't we?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? Further debate. Does any other member wish to speak?

There being none, Mr. Bartolucci has moved third reading of Bill 16, An Act to amend Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carries? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour say "aye."

All those opposed say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House is adjourned until 10 o'clock Thursday morning, April 24.

The House adjourned at 1904.

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Thursday 24 April 2008

Jeudi 24 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 24 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 24 avril 2008

The House met at 1000.
Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT DE L'ENFANCE

Mr. Craitor moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act / Projet de loi 33, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Craitor, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Kim Craitor: It's with extreme pleasure that I introduce Bill 33 for second reading. My bill is An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act. It is commonly called the grandparents' rights bill, but I prefer to call it the grandchild's rights bill. It's a bill designed to ensure that children who have formed a positive and loving bond with their grandparents will have the opportunity to continue to do so if their parents get involved with a divorce or if for some other reason they are separated from their parents. This is the third time I've introduced this bill, and I am praying, along with the thousands or so of grandparents who are watching this debate on the parliamentary channel today, that three times will be lucky.

Let me talk for a moment about the technical side of what I'm proposing. I propose in section 24 of the Children's Law Reform Act, when the courts look at the merits of an application for custody or access to children, to insert two clauses. First, I propose to add a clause to reinforce to the courts the importance in a child's life of maintaining positive emotional ties with either set of grandparents. Secondly, I propose that the courts consider the willingness of each person applying for custody of a child to facilitate maintaining the child's positive contact with each parent and grandparent, as is consistent with the best interests of the child. It's just that simple.

Grandparents' access and custodial rights is an issue that was before us last session. It's back again, and it's not going to go away. There are some very human faces of people watching us today who care passionately for and love their grandchildren, but they have been denied visitation access or are currently raising grandchildren after experiencing a lot of difficulty establishing their rights before the law and spending a lot of money in the courts.

Far too often, as many of you in this House may know, after a messy divorce, for example, access to children of the marriage has unfortunately been used as a lethal weapon. Spite, hatred, revenge and anger can be an awful thing, but no child—no child—should be used as a weapon.

Let me outline to you how I came to realize that far too often in this battleground, grandparents also lose access to their grandchildren.

When I was first elected, one of the first groups that came to see me in my community office were 12 grandparents. During the two and a half hours of discussion that followed, I truly realized the significance of problems that grandparents were having. Thanks to their help and help from grandparents from across Ontario and now across Canada, we sat down and felt that the best way to bring attention to this growing problem was to bring forward this bill to the House.

In fact, I want to tell you that a modified form of my proposed bill has already been considered in the Yukon and in six other provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia, in fact, had its law reform commission look at the pros and cons of my type of legislation. What it concluded, like the current Ontario legislation we have now, was that there's nothing in the legislation that prevented access to and custody of children by grandparents. But they also said there was a real, practical need to highlight the maintaining of positive grandparental involvement in the disrupted lives of children, which is simply what my bill is doing.

On its face, Bill 33 really is a modest bill. In fact, it will cost the province nothing, not a cent. The bill is simply about grandparental access and the nurturing and development of children. It's nothing more and it's nothing less. They have a voice, and their voice needs to be heard: grandparents' and grandchildren's voices. We often forget that we must speak for the grandchildren, and that's what my bill does.

When I first introduced this bill in 2004, I was really blown away by the number of phone calls, e-mails, letters and people visiting my office to describe the pain and suffering that caring grandparents suffered as children's

relationships broke down in high-conflict matrimonial situations. In fact, my office was flooded with well over 2,000 contacts. Many of them came not only from Ontario, they came from other provinces across Canada, from the United States, and even beyond that.

Nearly four years later, that number has doubled. My office and I hear the pleas of grandparents daily who need the help of the House to allow them to see their grandchildren. In many cases, these grandchildren were first used as weapons in custody battles and then denied access to one or both of their grandparents.

The relationship of a child to their grandparents is in fact a beautiful and self-affirming association. Not all these situations are caused by divorce. I was particularly taken by a situation in my riding of Niagara-on-the-Lake. A grandparent wrote me a letter, and I want to share it with the House. I still remember reading the letter four years ago. I think of it every day and it has not left me, nor do I think it ever will.

It's a very emotional situation. Their daughter passed away far, far, far too young. For two years, in the painful time before her passing, the grandparents took care of their granddaughter and formed a very close mutual bond with her. The husband remarried shortly thereafter, and since then, with no explanation, has denied them the right to their daughter's child. I agreed with them when they wrote to me that nobody should have the right to deny children the love they deserve.

1010

I would also like the House to hear a couple of other e-mails because these are the realities of the bill that I'm proposing. They are about personal situations that grandparents are going through. Here's one that I received from Maurene White on behalf of Cangrands, a national organization that advocates on behalf of caring grandparents and their grandchildren.

"Dear Kim,

"Please give passage of private member's Bill 33 urgent priority.

"As you know, Bill 33 is An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act and has passed the first reading this session.

"It passed to the social concerns committee in the previous session, which ended before it was passed into law.

"More than 75,000 Ontario grandparents now remain denied of access to visiting with one or more beloved grandchildren.

"On fixed pensions, we do not have the financial resources to lobby extensively for this reform that your bill is proposing.

"For us and approximately 112,500 grandchildren in Ontario" to suffer the fact that they are being denied the benefits of relationships between their grandchild and grandparents "is surely one of the tragedies of contemporary society, and the result can only be damaging to future generations.

"In Quebec, article 611 of the civil code is a crucial tool for settling disputes. Bill 33 is more elaborate and clearer than article 611. Once passed into law, Bill 33 will surely afford more efficient, rapid settlements.

"We have great hope you will see that Bill 33 quickly passes the remaining readings and proceeds to the social concerns committee to become law very soon.

"This could leave time for some grandparents and grandchildren to be reunited this summer.

"We urgently plead that you make this a reality for us.

"Thank you very much for considering our petition," and our concerns.

I could go on; I have over 4,000 of these e-mails, of these personal stories.

What am I asking for? What are the grandparents asking for? Something very simple: that when the courts consider custody or access, they look at grandparents. They are a very special type of individual. They provide a very special relationship with their children. I'm truly convinced that with a little prodding and encouragement, the courts and social agencies can provide real leadership in providing access to grandchildren.

I'm standing here simply to say to the House, to all of my colleagues, to the members: Please support second reading of Bill 33. In doing so, this bill will continue to go on to public hearings and grandparents' rights will be reinstated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to thank the member from Niagara Falls. I will say at the outset that we in the New Democratic Party are going to support this bill. I personally am going to support it. I think it's an important piece of legislation.

What I find rather sad about the situation is that it's taken this member from Niagara Falls three times to bring it before this House—three times. I know that other members, from this side of the floor, at least, have debated ad infinitum bills that have less import. I'm thinking in particular about some more objectionable bills, like Bill 35, the slush fund bill that we spent so many hours in this House debating, when very hopefully we could be passing something like this private member's bill.

So one asks, why is it a private member's bill and why is it not a government bill? Why is the weight of the caucus on the other side of the House not behind this? Why is the weight of the McGuinty government not behind grandparents and grandparents' rights in this province? I think that's a legitimate question to ask.

I certainly want to extend to the member from Niagara Falls our hope from this side of the floor that this time he is successful, and again, would that he were successful earlier and not have to go through this again and again and again.

In terms of the legislation itself, as he said, it follows on the heels of legislation that has been brought in in other provinces. In particular—and it's interesting that so often we look to Quebec for the lead on these things—certainly Quebec's civil code offers the strongest language. In their section 611, it states, "In no case may the

father or mother, without grave reason, interfere with personal relations between the child and his"—or her—"grandparents." That's strong language. Perhaps if this bill is given a chance, if it's not just fluffed off again, we can strengthen the language, if anything, in this bill where grandparents are concerned.

There is a caveat, however, and I do want to bring it to his attention, so that if the bill is looked at in committee, some of the language can be tightened up. The Ontario Women's Justice Network has written about such legislation. The women's justice network, just to give them a bit of a plug in this House—not that they need one—do amazing work and they do particularly amazing work where families are concerned, where the woman is on her own, where she is a single parent, where there has been an issue of abuse. They point out:

"The situation can become somewhat more complex where the parents have separated and have different agendas.

"For example, a mother leaving an abusive partner will want to ensure that her children's safety is protected. She may wish to limit access by the paternal grandparents because of concerns that the grandparents will not protect the children from their father or will badmouth her to the children. The father may see access by his parents as a way to get his own access, through a backdoor.

"In these cases"—again, I'm still reading from what they've done on this issue—"sometimes both the grandparents and the grandchildren are the pawns of the abuser—the grandparents may be genuinely trying to maintain a relationship with their grandchildren—and sometimes the grandparents are actively attempting to undermine the efforts of the mother to assure the safety and well-being of her children. It can be difficult for the court to sort out the motivation of the grandparents as well as the other parties."

So there is some sensitivity around this issue and there are ways of manipulating codes that have been brought in in other provinces to abet abusers and not prevent abuse. I just raise that as a bit of a red flag that we need to look at when we're looking at all the finer points of this legislation, if and when it goes forward.

The most critical phrase in this bill—and I can't stress this enough; the most critical phrase in any family law—is "the best interests of the child." That really dictates to whoever is doing the adjudicating what position to take. Every family is somewhat different in this regard. Every family has different issues. Again, because of the work that the Ontario Women's Justice Network has done around women who have been abused dealing with their abusers, trying to keep their children safe, seeing grandparents as a possible backdoor, I simply hold that out.

I also want to hold out something else they've done. We tend to be a litigious society—not quite so much as our neighbours to the south, but we are—and we have to own that. It's particularly egregious when families have to go through the court route to find some answer to their issues. One of the points that the women's justice network makes—and they make it well, I think—is, "The law is seldom the best way to resolve the complex and emotional disputes that can arise among and between family members. The law is an important last resort when all other strategies have failed or when safety is an immediate issue, but it should not often be the first remedy sought."

I really would recommend that anybody watching this—all the grandparents are concerned, the parents are concerned, the children who are watching this are also concerned—go to the Ontario Women's Justice Network and read this, because they go into great detail as to ways to avoid the court alternative, ways of building good relationships, ways of keeping those relationships fostered and alive between different generations in one family. Again, that's critically important. They say things like, "Build a good relationship with both parents of the grandchildren, not just the one who is your child; avoid criticizing the parent(s) in front of the children; do not play the children off against a parent or use the child as a messenger; support the parents' parenting values and strategies and discuss disagreements in a constructive and supportive manner when the grandchild is not present."

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They go on also that when parents are separating, not to take sides; to offer help and support with the children, and of course, again, always to maintain contact with the children—it's so important—where they can, obviously. I know that the member of Niagara Falls is addressing situations where that's not possible, but one hopes that it doesn't automatically get to that situation, that there are steps that grandparents and parents can take before it goes down that dark road.

I wanted to take just a few minutes, only because I have my son in the House, to also give a little bit of a tribute to my own grandmother and his grandmother, who he never actually met. My grandmother was one of those custodial grandparents. She played a phenomenally important role in my life and in the lives of my siblings as well. We grew up in a fractious house with a lot of trauma. My grandmother was one of those incredible grandparents—I'm sure there are many who are watching today—who actually provided the stability that we needed, both financial and emotional.

She was there, not just for her family—and I know that others are ringing with what I say—but really, in a sense, for the family of humankind. We grew up in a house on Bedford Road, and Glenn Gould used to come into our house to play the piano. Other musicians would come and go. People who had no home would be housed in our big roomy house on Bedford Road. Everyone was always welcome to dinner. We had at least 10 at dinner every night. My grandmother always sat at the head of that table and presided over that table, again, with compassion and love, particularly to the children and to those who needed compassion and love. So she provided the example that allowed us to grow and to grow with some strength, to overcome hardship and adversity. I wanted to pay tribute to her, because she certainly made a huge difference in my life.

I want to also say, because I know we've also heard in my office from grandparents who would love to have access to the children and don't, that the hearts of not only myself but the entire New Democratic Party go out to you, and not only to grandparents but to all of those who play a really important role in the lives of other people's biological children. It's said these days that we're more family bushes than we are family trees, that we have extended relatives, that we have mentors, that we have people who come in and go out of our lives who really play significant roles. A small number of those are related to us biologically; a great number of those are related to us in a more universal sense.

It's so important to the lives of children that people parent, in a sense, other's children. You know, the old adage "It takes a village to raise a child" is absolutely true. I know that in the egregious issues of child abuse, this becomes life-saving or not—as the case may be—because we all know, I hope we all know, and I hope those listening know, that it is everyone's responsibility if they know of abuse, if they know that a child is going through a difficult situation, to take some role, to step up, to alert the authorities and to do what they need to do. No one is exempt from that role, whether related or not. This gives all of us in this House a chance to reiterate, for everyone who comes in contact with a child, how important their role is in the life of that child.

It's particularly important here, of course. It's interesting because those at home might not know we have pages in the House. We have children in the House as we speak about this bill and about grandparents and the role of grandparents in children's lives—I would describe their role as other parents in children's lives—all of those other parents: clergy; teachers; even members here, who I know play roles in Big Brothers, Big Sisters and other organizations that again can be, and often are, absolutely life-saving for children.

Again, to get back to the bill at hand: This bill from the member from Niagara Falls, coming back again, for the third time, is a critical piece of legislation. It's important. It needs to be passed. It needs to be passed speedily. I believe the language could be strengthened. I believe a couple of the red flags that I've raised about the back door—possibly for the abuser coming through the grandparents—angle on this has to be looked at and has to be tightened.

I believe that, again, "the best interests of the child" is the critical phrase here and has to always supersede anyone's consideration, and that includes grandparents—it actually should include parents' considerations as well, and I realize that too often, it does not. "The best interests of the child" is that phrase that is essential in this bill.

It's sad that it had to come to this House three times.

I don't know the inner workings of the caucus across the floor. I don't know why this isn't a government bill. I don't know why it doesn't have the weight of the Premier behind it. I don't know why it doesn't have the weight of the Minister of Children and Youth Services behind it. I don't know why the support isn't there for grandparents, for those who are concerned or should be concerned and intimately involved in the lives of their children, if it's good for the child, if it serves the best interests of the child. I would wish that that were not so. I and, I know, the members of the New Democratic Party would love to see this bill come back as a government bill, and then we know it would be passed into law. We hesitate to see the day that the member from Niagara Falls brings it back a fourth time or a fifth time. Certainly, that's not what we're after here; we're after speedy passage. If there's anything we can do to affect that, including calling for unanimous consent for second or third reading, I'm absolutely happy to do that.

So, I leave that offer open for the member from Niagara Falls. Certainly, I look forward to hearing my colleagues from the Progressive Conservative Party speak to this, to see whether they would be amenable to something like unanimous consent on this bill.

When it's looked at in committee, I would support the strengthening of the language, similar to that in Quebec legislation, and also, of course, a little bit of a caveat, or perhaps just putting in bold "the best interests of the child," because we would hate to see this being used by anyone for something less than the best interests of the child.

It's been a delight to speak on this bill. It's been a great delight to do it in honour of my own grandmother, who played such a seminal role in my life, and all the grandmothers and grandfathers who play seminal roles in the lives of their children. We hope that we won't have to debate this bill again. We hope this is the last time we see it in this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased to speak this morning in favour of Bill 33, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, and I'm pleased to be here again in the House for the third time while my colleague the MPP for Niagara Falls brings this forward.

We all know that children need stability, and we know that children need feelings of self-worth and it's vital that they form meaningful, long-term relationships. Unfortunately, there are times, as the member from Niagara Falls has mentioned, when families experience a traumatic event, either through divorce or separation or sometimes the unexpected death of an adult child. I believe that this bill will clarify the importance of children's relationships with their parents and their grandparents.

Family law issues, particularly as they relate to custody of and access to children, can be really difficult. This is no less so when dealing with the issue of access by grandparents to their grandchildren. Fortunately, in most cases, arrangements relating to the custody of and access to children, including access by grandparents and others, are settled without recourse to the litigation and the courts. The cases that do come before the courts, therefore, represent a very small percentage of the overall number of potential family law cases.

Historically, grandparents have had no legal rights of access to their grandchildren simply by virtue of their

biological relationship. Legislation in all Canadian jurisdictions now makes it possible for grandparents to apply for custody of or access to their grandchildren. There is no jurisdiction in Canada, however, which provides grandparents access as a right, which is usually referred to as presumptive right of access.

There is no question that in most cases, the continuation of an existing grandparent-grandchild relationship is in the best interests of the child. Similarly, relations between a child and other family members, such as aunts, uncles, siblings, step-parents, step-grandparents and step-siblings, can be and often are tremendously beneficial to a child's welfare, health and development.

Grandparents are a family's first reserve in times of crisis. They act as playmates for their children, role models, family historians and mentors, and they help lay a foundation for healthy self-esteem and security in children. They are an important safety net.

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Research suggests that grandparents play a significant role in the lives of children. In fact, ignoring the existence of a grandparent who has formed strong bonds with a child may not represent the best interests of that child. Studies have indicated that a grandparent's role is an integral part of a child's self-identity.

Only Quebec, British Columbia, New Brunswick, and the Yukon have access legislation that presumes that contact with grandparents is in the best interests of a child. This places the responsibility with the parents to show serious cause why access would not be in the child's best interests. All but three states in the US have laws permitting grandparents to petition for visitation upon death or divorce of an adult. This assures the grandparent the right to be heard in court, but it still remains for the court to decide if it is in the child's best interests to visit with that grandparent.

I'd like to use my remaining time here this morning to speak in a personal way about my relationship with my grandparents. My parents immigrated to Canada when I was three years old, leaving all of our extended family both in Ireland and England. There were a couple of visits back and forth over the years, but I didn't have the luxury of a Sunday night dinner to talk with my grandparents once a week. So for the most part, as a youngster, I got to know my maternal grandparents only through audiotapes, handwritten letters and parcels at Christmastime. Although I didn't have their physical presence in my life as a child, I did feel the unconditional love and attention that all grandparents shower on a grandchild. They offered joy, love, fun, energy and context to everything I did. As their only grandchild, I basked in their approval and pride. I wish to recognize the special role and effort that my grandparents Rose and Frank Gray played long distance not only in my childhood, but later in helping me rear one of my own children.

I'm the parent of three boys. My second son is now 22 years old, but when he was very young, he had some significant challenges. He had fine and gross motor delays, as well as severe language and hearing difficulties. My grandmother saw in Kevin a child who just needed time to blossom. She never accepted the fact that he was delayed, and spoke of the untapped potential that no one else could see at the time. She was unfailingly positive in championing his progress as he gradually mastered important milestones. Despite the distance, both grandparents cheered and loved unconditionally. I think that's the most special thing about grandparents.

My grandparents are no longer with us, but I would like to have it known that their influence was meaningful and their instincts—despite not being based on medical evidence of the day—were extraordinarily accurate in their predictions. My son is now following his dream to be a sports announcer. He's worked for the last two years in a small Manitoba radio station, and I attribute his success in part to the strong support in his early years by his great-grandparents. They were great in more ways than one.

Grandparents are a valuable resource, an untapped resource, and I support maintaining ties between children and their grandparents. I'm really pleased to be here again supporting my colleague from Niagara Falls in his attempt to amend the Children's Law Reform Act.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: As a mother and a grandmother, I support initiatives that offer equal access to family members. It is really a sad state of affairs when we have to legislate access to family members, and I credit the member from Niagara Falls for bringing this issue forward and addressing it in this way.

I firmly believe that children should not be used as pawns, however, in any custody battle between adults, be it parents or grandparents. I cannot imagine being refused access to Olivia, my granddaughter, my own flesh and blood, and I hope that I never have to go through that.

Grandparents bring so much to a child's life. Grandparents have the time to linger. They linger over a meal; they linger over a discussion. They often are the best time for children to open up and share their day and their secrets. Grandparents bring the perspective of a different time, of a slower pace and, yes, a simpler life. They ground their grandchildren with a connection to their family history, to their roots and to their experiences in a different time and place. To remove or deny that experience to our youth would be devastating to those children who have been raised with grandparents in their lives. To know that your grandchild is within reach, yet you are denied the right to hold that child or visit that child, is too painful to imagine. My heart does go out to the grandparents who currently are experiencing this injustice.

We here in the Legislature are charged with the duty of creating a well-rounded legislation, and I take that responsibility very seriously. I need to set aside my perspective for a moment as a grandparent and ask the questions I'm duty bound to ask.

My first concern centres around the awarding of custody to a parent who is best able to facilitate access to a grandparent. This inclusion, if interpreted by the letter of the law, may, and I suggest would, discriminate against a

parent whose own parents are deceased. Our goal in amending legislation should be to remove that opportunity for any discrimination. Custody arrangements need to be determined in the child's best interest.

The role of grandparents should be considered in terms of enhancing the quality of life for the children who are being considered. They should not be lined up like little pawns on one side or the other. We exist to round out the lives of our grandchildren as grandparents, not to enhance the bargaining power in any custody negotiations.

No matter which parent is awarded custody, the grandparents from each side of the dispute should have equal access to their grandchildren. One grandparent should not be frozen out of the relationship because the custody agreement is not weighted in their own child's interest.

Custody negotiations, in the most amicable divorce situations, can turn into a nightmare for all parties, and the kids are caught like the meat in a sandwich. Children become pawns in a confusing situation of ownership. What I do not want to see is grandparents and children becoming pawns in a complex game of legal cat and mouse.

Grandparents have an even more important role to play in an acrimonious divorce. They are the Switzerland, let's call it, in the midst of a war. They are a neutral body who can offer an atmosphere of stability in a time of emotional upheaval for children. If we place grandparents on one side or another, children will lose this safety net or divorce-free zone in which they can relax and be themselves.

We all know that children hear and see much more than we give them credit for. Children of divorce know exactly who was on mom's side and who was on dad's side. That list should be kept for friends and neighbours, not grandparents. They should never be forced to pick sides. They should never end up on a list that negatively affects their relationship with their grandchild at a time when the grandchildren need them most.

I also feel that this could be a slippery slope if the impact or weight of the grandparents is not clearly defined. What I mean by that is, will the lawyers now be digging in the history of the grandparents for some skeleton to use to their client's advantage? Will the relationship between the parents and the grandparents be called into question or held to a certain standard to qualify? There is already too much muck in divorce proceedings as it is. We do not need to muddy the waters further with superfluous connections and decades-old scandals that the families have already recovered from once, a long time ago. Family Court needs to be able to operate in a swift manner, while respecting the interests of all parties at hand, but especially the children.

1040

Children need stability and they need to know what is happening to the family dynamic in order to feel safe and secure. I do have concerns that this legislation may set up another layer of bureaucracy that would delay judgments and interfere with the decision-making process. We have enough legal hoops to jump through at the present time that are not always in the bests interests of the children; I'm not eager to see us create more. I'm interested to hear what our stakeholders in the Family Court system feel about this legislation and I look forward to the opportunity to hear from them as this legislation proceeds, I hope, through the public consultation process. My information from the legal community is that judges and lawyers are already using these principles on a daily basis. As legislators, it would help us greatly to know if we are being asked to simply codify what exists in family law practice today or if in fact we are reinventing the wheel.

I feel for my colleague across the floor. This legislation seems to be, at first blush, a really good idea and I hope that his private member's bill has the opportunity to go through the entire process this time around. I know that the member for Niagara Falls has introduced this legislation several times before. It was entitled Bill 8 and it died the same death as my Bill 42. I hope the member opposite will be able to impress upon his colleagues the importance of allowing that public process and allowing the stakeholders on this issue to participate in the process. The McGuinty government appears to be afraid of public opinion. They are not ones to invite or seek out participation at all. In fact, it appears to me that they go out of their way to silence the public, as the recent changes to the standing orders suggest.

While I did my due diligence and connected with stakeholders that I'm familiar with, I would like the opportunity to hear from the people who raised this issue with the member for Niagara Falls. These individuals or groups were persistent enough in their efforts not to allow the McGuinty government to silence their mission and I believe they have a right to be heard. In support of my colleague across the floor, I look forward to the full public hearing for this bill that my legislation never had the opportunity to experience. And should, for some reason, his bill not make it through the gauntlet of the Premier's office, I will be there with a sympathetic shoulder.

I want to state for the record that the most important issue here is that the onus be placed on all parties to prove to the court that they are acting in the best interests of the child or children before them. My caucus colleagues and I believe that the best interests of the child are paramount—more important than anything else. That being said, the rights of the parents must be respected and the grandparents included to the degree that best meets the needs of the children.

I look forward to watching this legislation move through the process and I thank you for the opportunity to speak, as a legislator, as a mother and as a grandmother.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased this morning to stand up and speak in support of Bill 33, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act.

I want to first commend the member for Niagara Falls for bringing this issue to the House for the third time,

which shows his determination about passing this bill. I believe it's a very important issue we're debating here this morning. We heard from many different speakers before my talking about the importance of this connection.

As you know, grandparents often become the family's first reserves in times of crisis. Grandparents act as fun playmates for children, role models, family historians, mentors, and help to establish self-esteem and security for children. All these elements are important for children, and we have no right, I think, from a human perspective, to disconnect this relationship.

When I was a young boy, my grandparents used to live in a different town. I used to look forward to every event, every vacation, to go and visit them, especially in the summertime, when I used to get the chance to spend the summer with them, on both sides—my father's side and my mother's side. Most importantly, we have a tradition in our family where we name the oldest boy or girl after their grandparent's name. For instance, my name is Khalil Jawad Ramal. My grandfather was named Khalil, and his grandfather was Khalil, so we pass on the tradition to our children. My son is named Jawad Khalil Ramal and my father is named Jawad Khalil Ramal. I was talking to my son the other day and was hoping he'd call his son, if he got married, Khalil. He said, "Don't even think about it."

For that reason, we established a good relationship with my grandparents. My grandfather used to love me so much. I used to go visit and he'd give me all the treats, whatever I wanted, because my name was like his name, and he thinks, in his mind, this has to pass the tradition on to me, and I would hope I've passed the traditional family to my kids and my kids' kids.

Like many people said who spoke before me, due to a divorce situation, the relationship between the wife and husband can get ugly. Who pays the price? Often, the grandparents. As you know, when according to the law the mother continues to be awarded sole custody of the children, the maternal grandparents will enjoy a closer relationship with the grandchildren, while the paternal grandparents will continue to be at risk, the connections with the grandparents.

I think if this bill passes, it will establish a good basis, a good continuation of the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents. It's very important, as I mentioned, that grandparents play a pivotal roles in our lives.

Ten years ago I was married, and for some reason, we got divorced. Out of this marriage we had a son, as I mentioned, named Jawad. I don't want my son not to have a good relationship with my ex-wife's parents, because I think it's very important to have that relationship. In the same fashion, my ex-wife encouraged my son to have a good relationship with my parents. Both of us believe it's very important to create that relationship—very important. Whatever happened between me and her shouldn't reflect on the relationship between my son and his grandparents on both sides.

It's important for all of us, for human reasons, to keep that connection. The member for Niagara Falls, due to his determination, has brought this bill again—for the third time—to this House with the hope that this time it will get support from all the members and get the attention of the whole government bureaucracy, whatever it takes in order to pass this bill. As has been mentioned many different times, this bill already exists in many different provinces, like Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta, so why not in Ontario? Why not in Ontario?

I know there's some reservation about certain issues concerning this bill, but we can massage it, we can clean it up, in a fashion that can serve the aim of this bill, which will continue the establishment of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. It's very important.

Often, when you have some certain incident or accident—as I was reading in preparation for this bill, I went to the Internet and I downloaded different information. There was an incident of a mother who had a car accident and left an 18-month-old baby to her parents, but for some reason, when his ex-wife died, the father went and took the kid from the grandparents. The grandparents suffered a great deal because they had established a great relationship. They thought they were the natural parents after their daughter died. They could see their daughter through her children. In what fashion do we have the ability to disconnect that relationship?

I think it's a very important bill. I hope this bill, this time, can see the light and become law in Ontario. I want to thank the member for Niagara Falls for bringing it forward again. I hope all of us will support it. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

1050

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to speak this morning to the private member's bill presented by the member for Niagara Falls, Bill 33, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act. As mentioned, this bill has been brought forward three times to the Legislature. I hope that's a lucky sign that it may come forward in government legislation. I know I've supported it as it has come forward through the process, and here we go yet again. I'm sure the member is very sincere in bringing forward this bill today. My caucus colleague from Burlington has thoughtfully addressed some of her feelings of support and concern, both as a mother and a grandmother.

The explanatory note inside of the cover of the bill is clear: "The bill amends the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents." Since I was elected an MPP in 2003, I have heard heartbreaking stories from grandparents who have phoned in and not had access to their grandchildren in very difficult situations. That always seems to be the first priority for grandparents and parents and aunts and uncles: to look after their families, to be caring and nurturing.

That comes a lot from extended families. We've heard here today many family stories. Certainly my grandparents had a huge influence in my life. Extended families were there when our parents were busy in this day and age, and that is so important. As the member from

Parkdale–High Park said, it can make or break children, and I don't think we should forget that. When there are situations and turmoil in a family and that support is cut off, that is a tragedy that some children will never recover from. They should never be used as some sort of human bargaining chip for adults. It's a very dangerous situation to put children in.

We are focused, as legislators here, on doing our best for the people of Ontario, what's best for families, the environment, health care, the economy, education, just to name a few. It's also about providing opportunities and protection for those who need that protection, whether they need that protection as younger children or not so young.

Two days ago, we had a committee on social policy. We brought forward amendments to the Access to Adoption Records Act, Bill 12. I know today's bill is 33, but it's certainly a relative to Bill 12. The motion put forward by the member from Mississippi Mills is to ensure that children who are physically or sexually abused and removed from their families for their safety would be protected from having their personal information disclosed to the abuser without their consent.

Certainly the Access to Adoption Records Act "would have allowed a disclosure veto to victims of child abuse who are removed from their parents by the children's aid society and later adopted. This means that children who have been sexually or physically assaulted, even tortured, by their parent can do nothing to prevent that parent from"—and this is a quote from the children's aid society—"'To learn their names at age 19 and track them down.'" I think many of you who have heard very sad stories in your ridings realize that when you have a child who has been abused at a home and they turn 19 doesn't mean that all of a sudden they are really emotionally an adult at 19.

I think we all have to take that into account. This is a private member's bill; it's not as partisan. But I challenge the present government to really put down their partisanship and look at that seriously, because we want to protect children. Even as they become young adults, they still need protection, and we, as legislators, have that responsibility. It's not uncommon to have very nasty cases, and we need to protect those children.

As I said, Bill 33 is a relative of Bill 12, and we have that duty. So I put that out to the government to, please, look at this amendment and Bill 12 again, because it is not protecting children the way they should be protected.

I know that several members of the previous Liberal government who are now cabinet ministers supported this bill when it was brought forward before by the member from Niagara Falls, and now they are at the cabinet table. So I guess that brings us back to our political will, and that is to make this legislation. So I encourage those members on the government side who are supportive of this bill to take this to the cabinet table and make a decision that if this is what they want to bring forward, they should bring it forward. And it should go to committee, it should always go to committee, to public consultations, for some improvements—stakeholders come forward.

As we've said, this bill is to deal with grandparents, to emphasize the importance that grandparents have in children's lives and to help them with access to their grandchildren where they need it. So thank you very much for this opportunity this morning.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I also want to weigh in on this one as I'm certainly very much in support. As the grandmother of 12 grandchildren, I absolutely support what is happening here. I didn't know my own grandparents. I'm the child of an immigrant family and I never met them. I never had the opportunity to know my maternal grandparents. I met my paternal grandparents once. When I look at my own mother and my in-laws in terms of the impact they've had on my children, they are the bearers of the history of our families. They tell our children where we came from and why we came to Canada.

One other thing that I found my children will do, and I know my grandchildren do now, is come to their grandparents. The grandparents are an island of safety and a haven, where if you are in a bit of a dispute, especially as a teenager, and you're fighting with mom and dad because they won't let you do anything you think you should be able to do, you can go to grandma and grandpa—Opa and Oma—and talk to them, and they listen calmly.

People say all the time that we should have our grandchildren first. Every grandparent says that, and we all think that's so funny, because when people hear me talking and they don't have grandchildren, they don't understand why I can be so excited about 12. Every one of them is special and every one is unique. It's one of those things, and it's a proper way and a natural way. Grandparents are at a stage in their lives where they can enjoy them. They have the wisdom to deal with the children. They realize that the things that happen with kids at that age are just a small part of their lives. They will grow through those things; they just need to be supported through that. So grandparents play an important role.

I recognize the concern, as expressed by another member, in terms of this being a back door to allow potential abusers to have access to children. I can assure you, as a grandparent, I think most grandparents understand the difference between the adult and the vulnerable child. If I have to look at my own child and say, "You're the adult. You need to take responsibility. I'm here to protect the grandchildren because they are the vulnerable ones and they need my support," I don't think there are many grandparents in this province or in this country who would disagree with that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? There being none, Mr. Craitor, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I want to thank the members from Brampton–Springdale, London–Fanshawe, Parkdale–High Park, Burlington, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for speaking.

It has been so interesting to listen to the personal stories that have been shared by many of the members supporting the bill, and some great suggestions by some of the members as to what we should be looking at. And I do believe that it should continue on through public and committee hearings—I certainly believe that.

One personal story—and I think I should share mine. You know, politics is a funny world. People sometimes think we do everything because it's politically what we do. I never knew my parents. I was raised through the children's aid society. Somehow, while I was going through that system, these two elderly people, for whatever reason, took me in, kept me and raised me. They were very elderly. To me, they're my parents, but in fact if you look at their age, they were really grandparents. I often wonder where I would have been in my life and what would have happened to me if those two kind people hadn't taken me in. When these grandparents came to see me and sat with me, some of those personal experiences that you have in your life come forward and you realize the significance of what grandparents mean and the roles they play in their grandchildren's lives. So that is also one of the motivating factors that convinced me that this was the right thing to do.

I'm so pleased to hear some of the members speak. Private members' time, I tell you, is one of the best experiences as a provincial member of Parliament, which I thoroughly enjoy, because around this room and during this time we really speak from our hearts, which is really nice to hear. Sometimes partisanship leaves this room for a short time, and that's an exciting thing to see.

Thank you for your support. I'm looking forward to this bill continuing on.

1100

UNLAWFUL FIREARMS IN VEHICLES ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES ARMES À FEU ILLÉGALES DANS LES VÉHICULES

Mr. Colle moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Civil Remedies Act, 2001 to promote public safety and suppress conditions leading to crime by prohibiting driving on the highway in a motor vehicle in which there is an unlawfully possessed firearm / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et la Loi de 2001 sur les recours civils afin de promouvoir la sécurité publique et d'éliminer les conditions engendrant le crime en interdisant la conduite sur la voie publique d'un véhicule automobile dans lequel se trouve une arme à feu dont la possession est illégale.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Colle, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Mike Colle: Thank you for this opportunity to speak to Bill 56, which I introduced on April 9. My private member's bill, if passed, would give police officers the authority to impound a vehicle and suspend the licence of a driver who unlawfully possesses an illegal firearm or a crime gun in their vehicle. The suspension and impoundment would occur immediately and last for seven days. In addition to charges laid and proven in court, there will be possible further fines of up to $10,000, or imprisonment of up to six months. For further offences, there could be suspensions of up to five years, even a lifetime ban on driving in this province.

As you know, this plague of violence and gun violence affects many communities. There have been many attempts by our police forces and legislators—federally, provincially, and municipally—to do something about it. I am trying with my bill to give the police another tool to combat this scourge of gun violence, especially as it relates to illegal, unlawful guns. This act has, in essence, the potential to act as a deterrent so that these individuals will know that there will be an immediate consequence if they drive around on our streets with unlawful guns.

I would have to say that the bill I put forward has resulted from a number of tragic and recent incidents in my own riding. On March 14 of this year, six young men—innocent young men—who were just coming back from McDonald's were standing in front of their home and were gunned down in cold blood. Six young men—for no reason. In fact, the family of one of the young men that was killed was going to be here today, but they're in court for the bail hearing. This is the third or fourth time they've been in court for the bail hearing of the accused. So this bill is dedicated to the victims. In this case, it was Abdikarim Ahmed Abdikarim, an 18-year-old student at George Harvey Collegiate Institute.

Also, I've gotten a lot of support from Louise Russo, a mother of children who was, just like any other citizen, out on an evening going to the local deli, getting something to eat for her family. Somebody in an automobile decided to start shooting into the delicatessen. She is now confined to a wheelchair because of this horrible, horrible act. She is an amazingly strong person who continues to speak out against this type of gun violence. Louise fully supports my bill and any attempt to try and take these guns off of our streets.

I would also like to thank the men and women of the Toronto Police Services who have been very helpful in giving input in this bill. In one of my local divisions, 13 division, I would like to thank PC Mike Jander and PC Paul Coculuzzi, who have been great in supporting this bill, and Unit Commander David McLeod of 13 division, who has been very supportive.

The bill has received support in principle from the Toronto Police Services Board. Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair is supportive of the bill, and he thinks that this would be most helpful.

I'll just read you a quote from Police Chief William Blair of Toronto: "A private member's bill that would let police seize cars in which illegal handguns are found would provide significant help to Toronto police in getting guns off the street."

I also have the support of the president and general manager of the Ontario Safety League, Brian Patterson,

who thinks that the Ontario Safety League would be helped by this because Bill 56 would help ensure that the deadly mix of unlawful guns and motor vehicles is removed from our highways for the protection of our police and all of Ontarians.

This bill is, in essence, an attempt to look within the provincial jurisdiction. As you know, there's an attempt at a nationwide handgun ban, but provincially we have jurisdiction over motor vehicle licensing. Some of the ideas for my Bill 56 really came from the MPP from Willowdale, David Zimmer. In his bill, he in essence tried to do something about people who were drinking and boating. Under that legislation, which was eventually passed, people can have their licence suspended and cars impounded, if convicted of that.

Also, we passed a very effective piece of legislation which has similar provisions in it, and that's the anti-street racing legislation of Minister Donna Cansfield, whereby if you're speeding over 50 kilometres an hour on our streets, the police can impound the vehicle and can also suspend your licence. That's being done under provincial jurisdiction.

We can ask the federal government to undertake many measures, and some of them they have. I'm very glad that the federal government has now supported our call for a reverse onus on proving bail in a gun crime. That's going to really help the police.

This is also important in that it might help deter the smuggling of guns into this country and into this province. I am told by Police Chief Blair that most of—more than half—the guns that they seize in Toronto are smuggled, illegal guns. This bill would empower the police also to suspend the licence of another province's driver or a vehicle that's licensed in the United States, for instance. There are a number of incidents where guns are being smuggled in trucks, being smuggled in cars into Ontario, and are then sold and end up on our streets.

Look at the growing number of cases. I've done a recent media survey over the last while of drive-by shootings and people with road rage shooting at each other: In Brampton this year, a passenger in a silver four-door car was hit by a bullet that had been fired from a second blue vehicle driving on Goreway Drive; in Thornhill, three suspects held up a jewellery store at gunpoint at Promenade Mall, and the suspects fled the scene in a vehicle; in Scarborough, a black Ford SUV carrying two men—this was at Markham Road in Scarborough; in Toronto; in North York. This has just been in recent months where there have been instances of guns being carried in vehicles, shootings that occur, people cutting off people on the Gardiner Expressway. This is unacceptable behaviour.

It is too easy to have a gun. It is too easy to basically think that that gun empowers people. An unlawful firearm, that is, a stolen crime gun—the ones with the serials marked off, the ones that are, essentially, carried by these potential criminals. As I say, if they're carrying an unlawful gun in a vehicle, they're on the road to murder. We need to take them off the streets.

Provincially, we don't have all the powers over firearm control, but we do have powers over motor vehicle licences. This bill, if passed, would give us another tool in trying to make our roads and streets safer. It is not going to completely eliminate the gun violence, but at least it's a tool. The police on the street that I've talked to, the OPP officers I've talked to and the rank-and-file police officers in our divisions in Toronto think that this would give them an effective tool.

1110

It's too easy to say, "That gun in my car—I didn't know it was in my car"; "I borrowed the car"; "I rented the car"; "The gun was there"; "I had no knowledge of it being there"; "I didn't realize that my trunk had three guns in it"; "I just leased the car." They're getting away with it. There are so many excuses that they use to basically get off too easily when they have an illegal gun.

Why are they going in their vehicle down Keele Street with an unlawful gun in their car? Where are they going with that unlawful gun? This is not against people who have the legal right to carry guns, whether they be hunters, target shooters or police officers; this is against thugs who shouldn't be carrying guns.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 56, Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Civil Remedies Act, 2001 to promote public safety and suppress conditions leading to crime by prohibiting driving on the highway in a motor vehicle in which there is an unlawfully possessed firearm.

I have a few comments on this bill, and I know some of my colleagues do as well. I wanted to start with a few things around definitions and around just exactly what we're covering here. If we're covering all roads in Ontario, and that includes the streets of Toronto, the Queen's highways, King's highways, all county roads—all roads in the province of Ontario—then it would be interesting to see some explanation on that. It may have some impact on rural Ontario.

If we've got some thug driving around who's got a stolen gun or an illegal gun that he has purchased illegally, that isn't registered in any way whatsoever, I thought there were penalties to cover that. I still think there are. If you have an illegal handgun and it's not registered, and you're pulled over by the police, they can confiscate that handgun and there are some severe penalties for that.

The person with that particular gun—say the car is owned by a rental company like Hertz or whatever, or it's owned by a relative, then I have a little bit of a problem with taking someone else's vehicle, impounding it and having a severe penalty on that. It reminds me a lot of the photo radar, which was brought in a few years ago and our government removed it. Quite frankly, the photo radar did sort of the same kind of thing. It didn't matter who was driving the vehicle; the person who got penalized in the end was the one who got the bill in the mail, which was the owner of the car. I have a little bit of a

problem with that—particularly if a car is rented from a leasing agency—taking that car and having that person end up being responsible.

What I'm really concerned about, though, is rural Ontario. There still are a number of shotguns and .22s, that sort of thing, that are used for duck hunting and shooting a few groundhogs here and there. That's been part of the rural life forever. Some of them were not acquired under an acquisition permit years ago; they might be fairly older guns.

I would hate to think that if someone who has a collection of guns, and maybe one or two of them didn't have the proper certification under them, that person would have an opportunity to maybe have a severe penalty when they've had no criminal record whatsoever at any time in their past, and they'd suddenly lose their vehicle and have a very stiff fine. In fact, I think this even calls for penalties. I haven't any problem with any particular piece of legislation that goes after people bringing in illegal guns, that sort of thing, but I think we have to be very careful of our folks in rural Ontario.

The other thing that we should talk about a little bit in this legislation is the impact this will have on the policing community; for example, with the enforcement section of it. Obviously, every time you bring in a piece of legislation, there are more laws to enforce, and that requires more and more resources for the police services. I understand, from the member's statement, that he had the support of Chief Bill Blair. We haven't really heard an awful lot about that. I'm curious about what the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is saying about this, and I'm also curious about what the Minister of Transportation is saying about this particular bill, because it obviously affects both of those ministries as far as enforcement.

With enforcement, we've already been told by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services that he needs more police officers; he's said that. The federal government has been good enough to come forward in the 2008 federal budget with 2,500 new officers for Canada. That would be a kick-start program of 1,000 new police officers for the province of Ontario. I understand that the minister has signed on to that; that's $156 million coming to Ontario. So if we're going to start passing these kinds of private members' bills and we're getting the support for them, then at the same time we have to have the resources in place by the police services to accommodate that. I know that in the provincial budget there was no allocation of more resources for police services, although the federal program calls for 1,000 new police officers in Ontario over the next five years, and as I said earlier, there's $156 million that has been allocated towards that. So I'm hoping that if the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is in support of this legislation, he's also in support of providing more resources for our police services in Ontario.

The model the Ontario Provincial Police are working under: They're asking for approximately another 500 officers over the next five years. That's something all of our parties are familiar with from the last provincial election. If we were to implement that program, the federal money, this year, we could actually have 1,000 additional officers in Ontario: 500 at the OPP under the non-municipal contract policing programs, just strictly for highway safety patrol etc.—the programs where the OPP need additional resources. It also would be nice to see that, if the minister is in support of this private member's bill, he'd be in support of adding those new officers towards which the federal government has provided at least 50% of the funds.

I look forward to hearing some of those comments as this bill proceeds forward. I suspect that the member has the support of his caucus to at least go to third reading. I don't know whether it'll die on the order paper or whether it'll be a bill that will be brought forward by the government. Certainly we haven't seen a lot of private members' bills in this House in the last Parliament, or in this Parliament, proceed, so it will be interesting to see how this bill does. But I do hope that in the end there are no implications for rural Ontario residents, particularly those who use firearms for hunting and fishing and who might make a mistake by having a gun or firearms in their control without an acquisition permit. That could easily happen. I don't think the intent of the bill is that, but certainly under the legislation there would be an impact on it.

That's really all I had to say today. I know some of my other caucus colleagues have a few comments they'd like to make, and it will be interesting to see how this bill proceeds through the House. I appreciate the opportunity for saying a few words.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly, for the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, who introduced this bill, I understand the frustration that he feels, particularly with the deaths that occurred in his own riding. The first thing we in the New Democratic Party want to say is that our hearts and prayers go out to those who were affected.

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Will this bill stop those deaths? There's simple answer: absolutely not. I think the people of Ontario want to see criminals impounded, not their cars. When the police stop people in cars with guns, they want to put the people with the guns in jail, not the cars. That's what I think the people of Ontario want to see first and foremost.

I was trying to look for other examples of this. We had a shooting in Toronto just recently on the subway, so what are they going to do: take away his Metro pass? Will that really stop him? I don't think that's going to make much of a difference; I really don't. I think that when criminals decide they are going to do a drive-by shooting, they're not hampered by the thought that they might have their car impounded or their licence lost. Half the time, the cars they are driving aren't theirs anyway, and certainly, whether their licences are suspended, or, for that matter, taken away completely, really doesn't come much into play when they are thinking about drive-by shootings.

I know what the police work with, which is not much. Many members of this House have gone on drive-arounds with their local police forces; I certainly have, and I want to acknowledge the incredible work of 14 Division in my riding and also 11 Division. I had the privilege of driving around with 14 Division one night and seeing the computer light up with all the crimes in progress, and there's nothing more terrifying than seeing that. You see the lights, and I asked the sergeant I was driving with, "How many of these will you get to?" He said, "Maybe half." These are crimes in progress. That's terrifying.

There is something we can do to cut down on gun violence. One of the very critical aspects of what we can do, which the McGuinty government has promised and not delivered, is to have more community police out there. Certainly, there are fewer police per capita under the McGuinty Liberals than ever. Despite the promises to the contrary, despite the promises of a thousand new police officers, we don't see those police officers on our streets. The population has gone up; the number of police has not gone up in proportion. So when you call somebody at the police station, you might not necessarily get a response, because there are not enough bodies there. That's what the police in my two divisions are asking for: more money for more police officers and certainly more community policing, which everyone in both of my divisions is asking for. That would help make a huge difference.

I notice that he says "firearms" too and not "handguns" here, although I'm sure that the member includes handguns in his thoughts there. I recognize his frustration, because we in the New Democratic Party support a ban on handguns. We don't think there is any reason for anyone other than those who are licensed to carry handguns and should, like our police officers, have handguns. We know that about two thirds of the handguns used in crimes come over the border illegally, so we also recognize that a ban on handguns isn't the final answer to this, that perhaps we could also look at security at our borders in terms of preventing that illegal traffic, because that's certainly where a lot of the death that comes to Ontario is imported from. We don't think there is any reason for a citizen to carry a handgun unless they really need one and unless they are licensed to do so.

Finally, because I'm going to leave some time here for my colleague to speak about this, we also have to look at the broader picture. Why is there crime? I don't want to be alarmist because, quite frankly—and I don't know if this is the same across the province, but certainly it's true in the GTA and in my riding—crime has gone down. There is a significant decrease in crime. We remember the summer of the gun. There have been these pockets of violence. Of course, one death is too many deaths. The aim here is zero homicides, absolutely; there is no question. But when we look at the social substructure of what produces crime, we've got to look at those big issues, and this is something the McGuinty Liberals simply won't do.

We in the NDP brought forward a bill that we were hoping would get the support of this House, that $75 million of health promotion go into community centres, saving our pools, rugby fields and recreation facilities for kids, for young adults, so that there's something for them to do after school.

Of course, members know I'm vested in raising the minimum wage so that young people can live on minimum-wage jobs so that they're not absolutely relegated to poverty just because they happen to work at an entry-level job.

Certainly, we want to look at issues that affect family life, like child care, which we don't have; the larger issue of poverty, where one in eight children in this province lives in poverty. We know that these are all factors that add to a higher crime rate—we know this. We know that housing, for example, adds to a higher crime rate—we know this. We know that when you starve the education system of necessary dollars, in response, more money has to be spent by the justice system. Yet we still see an education system that is not fully funded and a formula that has not been fixed from the Harris-Eves era. Again, why won't the McGuinty Liberals look at the broader picture and put money into prevention of crime?

The final comment I will make is, this is one of those bills—and I'll borrow from William Shakespeare on this—where sound and fury that signifies not much—I changed the line there—and certainly not much in terms of the caucus members and the cabinet. Why, if this government is vested in this bill, does it not, like the bill we saw previously, which was a good bill—and don't get me wrong, we're going to vote for it. But voting for it is like voting for a statement that guns are bad. Obviously, one would not vote against such a bill, but the question is, will it make any difference? I certainly assert that it won't, and if it did, and if the member felt it would, then where is the Premier on this, where is the cabinet on this? Why is this not a government bill?

Again, there's nothing that we in the NDP want more than a safer Ontario, but we don't think this is the way to go about it.

Mr. David Zimmer: It's my pleasure to rise and speak in support of the member for Eglinton–Lawrence's bill. I'm going to share my time with some of my other colleagues.

I just want to speak to one aspect of this bill. I could speak for a long time on the entire bill, but let me speak to one aspect of the bill, and that's the impounding the car feature of this bill. Most of these shootings involve young people. Often, they're teenagers—17, 18, 19, 20 years old. They use these handguns and other weapons in the drive-by shootings. A piece of the crime, in nine cases out of 10, is the use of an automobile. They need a car to get to the scene. They need a car to get home. They use the car in a drive-by shooting. They use the car in another aspect of the crime: The gun is in the car.

By some strange quirk, my friends who are child psychologists tell me that of all the things that young men—and it's typically young men who are involved in

these shootings—really value, strangely enough, it's this ability to have a driver's licence and own a car. That is a high status symbol in their peer group. The psychologists tell me that one of the things that these young men really fear, are really nervous about, strangely enough, when they're going around involved in these offences using guns is not so much getting caught with the gun or getting caught for the crime—because they get into the court system and they use the court system to their advantage—but losing their car, this status symbol that they have.

So what this legislation does—and it's only one aspect of it, because there are many other strategies here in Ontario to deal with guns and gun offences. We have the various guns-and-gangs strategies out of the Attorney General's office. There's a host of initiatives in the police departments and other investigative authorities. But if we can make these young men think twice about transporting a gun in a car that they own or that they're driving, if they've got a driver's licence, and put that status symbol, that thing that they really value, under threat, and we say to them, "Look, if you're going to transport an illegal firearm, if you're going to use a gun in the commission of an offence along with a car and you're caught, whatever else happens to you—and you may go to jail for the gun offence and other terrible things might happen to you—for sure, if you've got a car, we're going to take it away from you; if you've got a driver's licence, we're going to take it away from you for a long, long time"—through this strange sort of juvenile mentality, it seems that this makes them think twice. In this bizarre thought process that they have, they just give passing thought to the idea of putting a gun in their pocket or sticking it in the glove compartment of a car, but if they think they're at risk of losing this driver's licence or losing the car, they say, "My God, I don't want to run that risk. I don't want to lose my driver's licence. I don't want to lose this fancy car that I've got fixed up." It's a bizarre thinking process, but nevertheless that's what my psychologist and psychiatrist friends tell me.

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So, if we can do anything, if we can make any contribution to reducing gun offences and all the tragedies that flow from them, it's worth doing. This isn't the only strategy. This is one aspect of Ontario's strategy to confront guns and crime offences. For that reason, I support this member's private member's bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: The member for Willowdale made reference to a bizarre thought process. I would suggest that whatever brought us to this bill was in fact a bizarre thought process.

I respect the member's intention. What I fail to understand is his proposed legislation. It talks about repossessing or impounding a car and suspending a driver's licence for someone who is found to have an illegal weapon in their car. Somehow this is to be a tool in the hands of police officers to combat crimes that are committed with illegal weapons. I don't understand. We have laws in place that make it illegal and that give us severe consequences for possessing illegal weapons. The police already have that tool.

The member for Willowdale makes reference to something that is of extreme value to young men who commit crimes with guns, and he says that his psychologists and psychiatrists tell him that it is the possession of a car and the possession of a driver's licence that is of greatest value. I would suggest that what is of far greater value to these young people is their freedom and that the loss of the freedom is what will be the deterrent, not the loss of a car or the loss of a licence.

That brings us to the heart of our problem in this province, and that is that there are no consequences to one's freedom for committing crime, regardless of what that crime might be.

If the member were to have brought forward a bill that says we, as a government, will ensure that our police officers have the resources—namely, another 500 or 1,000 police officers on the front lines—to help them deal with crime so that, as the member for Parkdale–High Park mentioned, when all the crime locations pop up on the computer, they could deal with all of them, not just half of them; and that when in fact an arrest is made, then the courts could properly deal with those criminals, those accused, and ensure that their crimes aren't bargained away or not dealt with at all, dismissed because there isn't enough resource within our system—that I could support, and I would wholeheartedly.

But public policy, when we create legislation here, is to go to the heart of the issue that it's intended to address. The second test of legislation should be: Is it enforceable? I believe that this legislation actually fails on both counts.

The intent is honourable, the objective is honourable, but at the end of the day, I believe that this is empty. It does not do what the intent is very clear about. So I will not vote for this legislation. I want to be very clear that I agree with the honourable member who brought it forward, in terms of his intent, but I will not vote for the legislation, because I can't stand by and allow people observing this Legislature to think that something is being done here about crime and safety on our streets and all we're giving them is some smoke and mirrors under the guise of legislation. Once again, the perception is that the government is protecting people when in fact the government is withholding resources from the police and they're withholding resources from our court system, so that the work that is being done by police is frustrated. Prosecutors are not able to prosecute, and we have gridlock in our courts, so that all too often, cases are actually thrown out rather than dealt with.

I go again to the heart of what the member from Willowdale spoke to. He is saying we have to deal with crime, and we have to send a signal to those who would commit crimes that something of value will be lost if they commit a crime. My point to him and to my colleagues here is that what is most valuable, and the real

signal we should be sending, is that what will be lost if you commit a crime with a gun is your freedom, that there will be consequences, that there will be jail time. What you lose is not just your licence or your car, but you lose the ability to continue to operate and to function within our free society, which is a privilege.

I will not vote for this legislation for that reason. This legislation misses the point. I believe it is really not much more than smoke and mirrors.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I first want to say, as a member of the New Democratic caucus, I will vote in favour of this legislation. I believe that, yes, this bill needs to get to committee because we need to deal with some of the aspects of the bill that some would see as basically needing strengthening, or a change about how this thing is applied. But the concept of what he's trying to do—I understand where the member is coming from. I've known the member for some years. He's honest and he's—what's the word I'm looking for?—sincere in what he's trying to bring forward. He's trying to deal with an issue in his community. We can't take that away from the member. We need to understand that he is responding to something that has happened in his community. I think we need to give him the respect and the support to allow him to do that. So I want to say upfront, as New Democrats, we will support it.

Will the bill, at the end of the day, prevent that type of tragedy? I'm not convinced. It might. Who knows? I'm not going to say for sure that it won't, because who knows what people will do? It would be unfair for me to say I can absolutely read into the future.

But let's look at what the bill is intending to do under Bill 56. I'm going to read the explanatory note very quickly for those who haven't had a chance. It says it makes it an offence to drive "on the highway in a motor vehicle in which there is an unlawfully possessed firearm," and then it spells out the penalties.

1140

The first thing is, it was mentioned by a number of people that if a person's going to have a firearm, lawfully or unlawfully, and decides they want to go out and do something stupid, they're either in a stolen car for the most part, and if they're not in a stolen car, they really don't care. They're out there to do mayhem, and that's what they're up to. It's unfortunate, but people don't follow laws in our society; by a majority, they do. The vast majority of people, of course, are law-abiding. Unfortunately, you have a small percentage of people in our society who decide not to follow the law and do what I would term very hurtful and stupid things, such as committing crime and, in cases such as were raised, eventually leading to murder.

The question becomes, how do you deter people from doing those things? I was just having a discussion with one of your colleagues from London. We were having a chat about whether it necessarily means we have tougher laws as a way of deterring somebody from acting out a crime. I think there's a really good debate on both sides of that one. For example, the United States of America has probably been a zealot when it comes to introducing legislation that incarcerates people for all kinds of things that we, in Canada, might incarcerate for a short period of time. They'll put them in for five, 10, 15 years for something that we may put somebody in for six months or a year. But does the United States of America, with tougher penalties, have less of a crime problem? I say no, it's completely the opposite. Canada has much less a crime problem as compared to the United States, and we have to ask ourselves why. Is it because the United States has tougher laws that should act as a deterrent? I think not. I think Madam DiNovo was right. The member from Parkdale–High Park basically said we need to deal with the causes of crime. I know my good friend Mr. Colle, the member for—and I forget—

Mr. Mike Colle: Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Eglinton–Lawrence. That's why I used your name. Sorry about that. That's why I'd never be the Speaker. I can never remember all the ridings.

I think you agree with me, that the way we really have an impact on making our society safe is by giving every child in our society the opportunity to grow up in a household where they are feeling loved and nurtured, where they're getting the support they need; that when they go into the school system, they get something of value and they build some values of respect for one another within our society. You do that by imparting those things, first, at the family level, then at the societal level through school and others.

Unfortunately, our society isn't perfect. There are families that are dysfunctional. You know them; I know them. They're not necessarily bad people. They're people who have had issues in their lives. It might be mental health issues. It might be a question of addiction. It might be a question that the person himself or herself had problems when they were younger and didn't have good parenting skills transmitted to them. What do you do with those children? That's really how you make a society have an effect on how much crime is going to take place, by doing all that we can as legislators, citizens, parents and members of our society to get at the root causes of crime.

I said at the beginning I will support this bill, as a member of the New Democratic caucus, because I understand what the member's trying to do. It's extremely frustrating, especially in a situation like yours, where you live in the city and see the tragedy that happened to this family. To stand back and do nothing and say, "Oh, well, there's a bigger issue here. I can do absolutely nothing," I think would be a disservice to your constituents.

I recognize and respect that you're bringing this forward as a means of at least having the debate and trying to figure out how we get at trying to eliminate the drive-by-type shootings that we've been seeing in this city and other places across Canada and the United States. I'm not convinced at the end of the day that the person jumping in the car with the unlawful or unregistered firearm is really going to take any consequence, but maybe there's a way of coming at it. This

is the beauty of the legislative process. We send this thing to committee. We have people who are more learned than us in these particular issues come before committee and tell us, "We understand what the problem is, but we think you need to do X, Y and Z. You need to amend whatever," so that eventually we end up with a product that maybe has an effect in the end. In that spirit, I fully support bringing this to committee, but I want to say upfront that I certainly don't think the way the bill is written is going to get us exactly where we want to go.

The only other thing I would say, in closing, in the last minute or so that I have left, is that the whole issue of firearms is one that's been difficult not only in Canada but also in the United States. There's a real sense that people have an ability—almost a right—to own a firearm for hunting or whatever it might be. It comes from a time of this country being a country that was much more a hunter-gatherer society, just to a certain extent, and that sort of value is transmitted. We struggle today, in this day and age, to find the balance between people's right to go out and hunt and do the things that they do with firearms, and the struggle of whether people should just have firearms for the sake of protecting themselves. I think it's a tough debate, because there are some really strong feelings on both sides of that one. All I know is this: We have a problem in our city, as we have across this nation and as they have in the United States. We're luckier than most in Canada; we have a pretty low crime rate compared to others. But we need to do what we can in order to try to deter these types of things from happening.

In the spirit of that, we'll support the bill and allow it to get to committee, and hopefully try to find ways of amending it to strengthen it so that in the end it really achieves the goal that the member is trying to reach.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to start my comments by thanking the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for his initiative on this issue. As you may know, Eglinton–Lawrence and York South–Weston share a border and some of our communities share similar priorities and challenges.

The Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, Bill 56, is, to me, an important initiative. It is based on the proposition that illegal handguns should not be out on the streets—and I'm sure that's an idea we can all get behind—and that there should be immediate consequences and actions that can be taken when such an offence has been committed.

Under the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, when a police officer finds a gun in a vehicle, the officer would suspend the person's driver's licence and detain the vehicle. This does not take their freedom away but certainly limits it, and if the car is not his or hers, the driver's licence would still be taken away. In Ontario, driving is a privilege, not a right, so it would serve as a deterrent. As we have heard from my colleague, the bill proposes amendments to the Highway Traffic Act and the Civil Remedies Act, because these are the bills that deal with unlawful activity in motor vehicles.

The work of the bill would begin at street level, while the illegal guns are out on the streets, being carted around outside of the public's eye, and that is what is so compelling about this approach. I want to say that just last Thursday I was at a community police liaison committee meeting at 12 Division of the Toronto police force in my riding of York South–Weston—and I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the officers at 12 Division for the great work they do in our community. I was pleased to meet the new superintendent, Brody Smollet, and to get an update about some of the more serious incidents of crimes that the division is dealing with, as well as the crime prevention initiatives that are taking place in our community and that are largely led by conscientious local citizens.

The new superintendent did raise this bill at the meeting last week and spoke enthusiastically about it. The entire community police liaison group—everyone who was present in the room—responded positively to the action that my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence is taking with this initiative. At the meeting, I also had the opportunity to learn about some of the youth-in-policing students that the division is going to welcome for the summer months, which will happen through this government's youth opportunities strategy. I want to say that I find that very important.

Another reason why I am pleased to speak to Bill 56 relates to a tragedy that affected Eglinton–Lawrence, the riding of my colleague, but also my riding of York South–Weston. This is the recent shooting death of a young man who lived in my colleague's riding but attended high school in my riding. I've had the opportunity to speak to the principal of the local school that the young victim attended, and he told me that the students of the school are hard at work being regular young people. They don't want to be labelled. They are ambitious. They are studying hard. They're looking forward to a bright future. This is an inspiring attitude, and I applaud the principal for providing leadership.

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I believe that this private member's bill, Bill 56, also shows leadership. While it is true that the federal government has jurisdiction over the ownership of firearms, we, as a provincial government, have jurisdiction over transportation and motor vehicle licensing and should always try to enhance public safety when we can. Although this bill may not be the total answer, this can be a strong step toward preventing crime in our communities, across the province, and showing leadership across the whole country.

On behalf of the people of York South–Weston, I reiterate my support for the proposed Bill 56 from my colleague from the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence, a neighbouring riding to my riding. This is an important step in the fight against gun crime. I thank him for his work in bringing this issue forward.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I am delighted to support this bill. A lot has been said about the ineffectiveness of it here today, which I find kind of strange. I'm glad Mr.

Klees is here today to listen to the details, because it was he who actually said this is just all smoke and mirrors and it's really very ineffective.

Just remember this: When you read the details of the bill, it's clear that beyond the impoundment and beyond the licence suspension, there's another section in here which is specific. It says there's also a fine of up to $10,000 and/or imprisonment up to six months.

Interjection.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: That's what it says. That's part of the bill.

Mr. Frank Klees: And/or.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: And/or imprisonment up to six months. That's pretty effective. That takes away what the member was talking about when he said the value is on freedom and the restriction on freedom and not so much in terms of impoundment of the car. It's right here in the bill. The bill does say you will lose your freedom for up to six months.

The question should be simply this: In what way can we be effective here? In what way can we take unlawful firearms off the street?

The member for Eglinton–Lawrence has a great idea with Bill 56. It says specifically that if you're caught with an unlawful firearm, your car will be impounded and all the other items I was listing earlier.

"Toronto Deputy Police Chief Tony Warr says the propensity for violence has reached down from major drug dealers to minor drug traffickers who carry guns because they are afraid of getting ripped off or shot by their competition.

"'Where in the past it would have been a fist fight, now it is a gunfight over the same minor issues. There seems to be an acceptance of violence more generally by the community and it is reflected in the way kids are acting in school, what we see on television and by these gangs where, if they have a problem, they shoot a person.'"

I am very delighted to support and put my name to this bill as well, because to me, it is clear there are other items that are involved as well.

When we look at the Canadian Police Information Centre records, it shows clearly that 85,000 firearms—about half of them restricted, as in handguns—are missing or stolen in Canada. Imagine that. So it isn't simply a question of having a greater degree of support, a greater degree of maintaining some security, to maintain your firearms and to lock them up. It's a question of having them stolen and being found in the cars. If it's in the car, the car, according to Mr. Colle, should be impounded.

I am happy to read a quote from Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair. If Bill Blair is saying that this bill is good, then I would be happy to support it as well. He says that a private member's bill that would let police seize cars in which illegal handguns are found, would provide significant help to Toronto police in getting guns off the street—if the police of Toronto say this, then I would be glad to support this bill.

In closing, let me simply say this: We heard from the Conservatives and some of the members from the NDP. Some will support this bill; others will not. Some will support it because it goes to committee, and there they would hope that other areas of how to restrict unlawful guns should be included. This, of course, is not totally sufficient. This is not what Mr. Colle indicates when he says we should support this bill. No. Of course there will be other items and there will be other adjustments made. There could be recommendations made on the committee level. We, of course, would have our chance to add our voice to it. It is clear that on our side, we see the benefits of Bill 56. I would hope that all members will support it, in spite of what their recommendations might be.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Colle, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Mike Colle: I do appreciate everybody's input. Just again, I'll read into the record from David Wilson, who's the president of the Toronto Police Association, who represents over 8,000 men and women in Toronto. What David Wilson says is: "We support your efforts to amend the Highway Traffic Act. We believe Bill 56 can be a valuable tool for police to use to combat gun violence and make the community safer."

This is from the leader of the men and women on the streets who know that over and over again, they catch the same people with guns. They get away with it. They're out on bail; they're in the streets. The police are arresting the same people, because essentially you have no onus—the federal laws are so weak that if you commit a crime with a gun, you're basically out on the street in 24 hours. The federal laws are too weak on gun crimes, so that's what we need.

This helps with the reality within our jurisdiction, where at least they take the car off the street, their licence off the street, a $10,000 fine and up to six months in jail. That's what we can do from our end. We're trying our best to do that. Certainly if you ask all of us who deal with this, what we have in place right now isn't doing the job. This will at least be a tool.

That's why the rank and file police officers support this bill, because they're the ones who are sometimes afraid to go to the door of a car. Who knows if that person is armed or not? It's happening more and more. Chief Blair says that almost every illegal gun they get on the streets of Toronto is in a car. We have to stop this nonsense.

They make excuses: Well, he borrowed the car or he leased the car. Some of the members opposite support it. Those are phony excuses. You have the responsibility. If you're driving a car and there's an illegal .38 in the trunk of your car, you shouldn't be allowed to drive. You should have no right to be on our streets in our communities if you're driving with a .38.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for private members' public business has expired. We shall first deal with ballot item number 15, standing in the name of Mr. Craitor.

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT DE L'ENFANCE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Craitor has moved second reading of Bill 33. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Bill 33 will be referred to—

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm asking that Bill 33 be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Craitor has asked that Bill 33 be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Agreed? Agreed.

We shall now deal with ballot item number 16, standing in the name of Mr. Colle.

UNLAWFUL FIREARMS IN VEHICLES ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES ARMES À FEU ILLÉGALES DANS LES VÉHICULES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Colle has moved second reading of Bill 56. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1200 to 1205.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil
Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Orazietti, David
Arnott, Ted	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Pendergast, Leeanna
Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Ramsay, David
Bisson, Gilles	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	Levac, Dave	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Marchese, Rosario	Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Scott, Laurie
Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 33; the nays are 6.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Colle—

Mr. Mike Colle: If I could have the bill go to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Colle has asked that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. Agreed? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair, and the House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1207 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HALTON MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to recognize the progress and the incredible achievements of the Halton Mentoring Partnership, which held their mentor recognition event this past Tuesday evening. The mentoring partnership program brings skilled immigrants and local professionals together in an occupation-specific mentoring relationship.

When I was regional chairman of Halton in 2005, our council recognized the need for a program of this nature. Through the dedicated efforts of volunteer mentors from Halton region, the municipalities of Oakville, Burlington, Halton Hills and Milton, and of course, our corporate and community leaders, this initiative has been a rousing success.

As our population in Ontario ages, the integration of foreign-skilled professionals into their chosen professions in their new homeland is critical to the future of our economic growth here in Ontario. It was an honour and a privilege to see professionals from diverse cultures and experiences join together in a common purpose.

The volunteers and the program managers for this important initiative deserve our gratitude for the significant contributions to the program's success. I would like to recognize the professionals who stepped forward to offer their experience to new Ontarians. You are a credit to your community.

WOMEN'S LEGAL EDUCATION AND ACTION FUND

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: As a long-time advocate for women's rights and gender equality, I rise today in recognition of a national charitable non-profit organization, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, also known as LEAF. LEAF works to advance the equality of women and girls in Canada through litigation, law reform and public education, using the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

LEAF is an organization committed to advancing women's equality through public-interest interventions and legal education. Since its inception in 1985, LEAF

has intervened in over 150 cases, helping women win landmark legal victories. LEAF is the only women's organization in Canada that focuses on legal action to challenge laws, policies and practices that continue to discriminate against women.

Last Thursday was Equality Day, marking the coming into force of the equality provisions in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms on April 17, 1985. Several women, including my colleague the Honourable Deb Matthews and my former boss, the Honourable Claire L'Heureux-Dubé, retired justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, joined forces with LEAF to honour the work of a fellow advocate for equality, Justice Bertha Wilson.

In 1982, Justice Wilson became the first woman ever to sit on the Supreme Court of Canada. Her tenure was best marked by her pioneering interpretations of the charter and devotion to securing equality rights for women and disenfranchised and marginalized groups. They've started the Justice Bertha Wilson fund.

I'm very proud to have taken part in Equality Day last week.

HOCKEY

Ms. Laurie Scott: It gives me great pleasure to tell the Legislature that the young men of the under-18 Canadian hockey team are returning home today from the International Ice Hockey Federation Under-18 Championship with gold medals around their necks.

There are two very special members of that team who I am proud to say have learned to play the fastest game on ice in none other than Haliburton, Ontario. Centre Cody Hodgson was captain of the Canadian team and top scorer of the tournament with two goals and 10 assists. Many of the members of this House will know his father as the long-time local MPP and minister, Chris Hodgson. Forward Matthew Duchene was also an essential part of the Canadian team's championship with five goals and three assists.

Hodgson is eligible for the NHL entry draft in 2008 and is highly touted to be picked early in the first round. Duchene will be eligible for the 2009 entry draft and is also considered to be a prime pick for an NHL team.

Both of these talented athletes began their hockey careers in Haliburton and are now teammates on the Brampton Battalion of the Ontario Hockey League.

The success of these young men is rooted in the dedication of the parents, coaches and players of the Haliburton arena. As the member of provincial Parliament for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, I am pleased to congratulate the pride of Haliburton's hockey program: Cody Hodgson and Matthew Duchene.

Thanks to the valuable contribution of these two world-class players from Haliburton, Canadian hockey is right where it belongs: the very best in the world.

Mr. Dave Levac: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to remove my jacket and show you the Allan Cup jersey.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Dave Levac: That's it. There you go.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members' statements.

HOCKEY

Mr. Dave Levac: Thanks to the House for this privilege of wearing the jersey that won the Allan Cup. On behalf of the constituents of my riding of Brant, I am proud to stand today to pay tribute to the Brantford Blast of Canada's senior AAA hockey league who, on Saturday night in front of a packed house at the Brantford and District Civic Centre, displayed incredible poise and skill, defeating the Bentley (Alberta) Generals 3-1 to win Canada's historic Allan Cup.

First contested in 1908, the Allan Cup is North America's oldest hockey tournament. As such, it's fitting that the city that gave us the Gretzkys, among other greats, hosted the 100th anniversary of this historic competition, defeating the Dundas Real McCoys, the Shawinigan Xtrême from Quebec and the Whitby Dunlops. The Brantford Blast thrilled more than 15,000 fans over a six-day period on their way to the championship.

Born and raised in Brant, I know that Brantford has a proud tradition of hockey and the Allan Cup, winning the championship twice: once in 1977 and again in 1987. We've done a three-peat.

I want to congratulate the team owner, president and manager, Peter Ham, his wife, Judy, coach Larry Trader and his staff and all the players for their hard work and determination this season and in the past six.

I want to thank my colleague Peter Fonseca, the Minister of Tourism, for the support from the Ontario government and, finally, I want to extend a tremendous thank you to all the volunteers and residents of Brant who worked so hard to make the 100th anniversary of the Allan Cup such a huge success.

Way to go, Brantford. We're very proud of you.

FISHING REGULATIONS

Mr. Randy Hillier: Once again the McGuinty government has broken another promise. On April 12, the Minister of Natural Resources met resort owners and learned of the crisis they are facing due to overregulation in eastern Ontario.

New panfish regulations are bankrupting our resort owners. On that day, she promised action within 48 hours, but we're all still waiting on the dock. Five days later, the minister added insult to injury when she voted to defeat Bill 57, a bill that would have eliminated red tape for the very folks she met with.

Ontario has over 5,500 fishing regulations—regulations that are bankrupting the little guy. The little guy is losing thousands of tourist dollars every day that the minister does not act. The minister's fault is not that she fails to get things right but that she's not even trying.

The resort owners are being played for suckers and they're trapped in the MNR's regulatory nets. The min-

ister must honour her commitments to the people of my riding. It's time for the minister to fish or cut bait.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In the heart of downtown Hamilton, a mountain of rubble paints an apt picture of the McGuinty government's wilful neglect of heritage preservation.

The Balfour building, next door to the historic, yet sadly ignored Lister Block, collapsed last week. In large measure, the weight of the McGuinty government's inertia can be blamed, for it is the McGuinty government that had the power to expedite the Lister Block restoration and be a real partner in restoring a key heritage landmark. Instead, the neighbouring building is a scrap heap because of Liberal foot-dragging.

Hamilton and Ontario heritage activists are acutely unhappy about the building's façade being lost for all times because the McGuinty government refused to request a stop to the demolition. The government's overall lack of commitment and follow-through can't be masked. It's hard to believe that this is the very government claiming to want to revitalize downtowns and support the city's preservation of significant older buildings like the Lister Block.

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On January 10, I requested a copy of the Ontario Heritage Trust report about the Lister Block under the Ontario freedom-of-information law. I was denied access because disclosing it would reveal the specific advice and recommendations to the minister. The McGuinty Liberals should make the Listor Block report public and let Hamiltonians knows what's behind the secrecy.

I sincerely hope the Minister of Culture will agree to meet quickly with Hamilton heritage preservationists. We need a minister with a commitment to saving these historical buildings, not one who's content at leaving Hamilton with a missing tooth in the face of its historic downtown streetscape.

MAZO DE LA ROCHE

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise today to recognize the 200th anniversary of Clarkson village, as well as to honour Mazo de la Roche and speak about her remarkable contributions to Canadian culture. Mazo de la Roche lived from 1879 to 1961 and was a prolific writer whose works include novels, short stories, plays and an autobiography. While living in Toronto, she spent her summers in what is now south Mississauga. She was inspired by the wooded scenery of Clarkson village.

Her third novel, Jalna, was the first in a series of 16. Back in 1927, the book won the top prize in Atlantic Monthly, a prestigious American literary magazine, which earned her international fame. The series was translated into many languages and adapted for stage, screen and television, making Mazo de la Roche one of the most widely read and popular Canadian authors of her time. Inspired in part by the woods of Clarkson and Benares, the Jalna novels chronicle the lives of the Whiteoaks family and their estate. Today, her influence is still very visible in Mississauga, from Mazo Crescent to Roche Court to the Whiteoaks community.

Recently, I attended a ceremony at Clarkson's Benares museum commemorating the national historic significance of Mazo de la Roche, where a monument in her honour was unveiled. This comes at an historic time for Clarkson, as this year marks its 200th anniversary.

I wish to acknowledge the important contributions by Mazo de la Roche, and I congratulate the Clarkson community on this historic milestone.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I rise in the House today to speak about how the McGuinty government is strengthening partnerships with First Nations people. Earlier this year, Michael Bryant, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, reached an historic agreement with our First Nations partners across Ontario. The agreement will mean more than $3 billion over 25 years transferred to our First Nations partners; $201 million has already flowed.

It means improved infrastructure, improved schools and housing, more training leading to more jobs, and greater economic development. The projects arising from this agreement will be selected according to priorities set by the First Nations themselves.

The McGuinty government is committed to our new approach to aboriginal affairs. This approach emphasizes a more co-operative and respectful relationship with Ontario's First Nations.

Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse said that this agreement "begins to address educational shortfalls; it begins to address economic opportunity, seeding joint ventures; it begins to address some of the healing that First Nations people have identified." I am proud to say that the McGuinty government is making a real difference for our First Nations communities both now and in the future.

PASSOVER

Mr. David Zimmer: I rise in the House today to bring Passover greetings to my constituents in the riding of Willowdale and, indeed, to all Ontarians. Today marks the fifth day of Passover. This holiday, which lasts for eight days, is a time for celebration and reflection. It marks the Israelite exodus from Egypt and celebrates their liberation from slavery. More importantly, the Passover story carries a universal message to stand up to discrimination and persecution wherever they are found.

This year is unique. The celebration of Passover coincides with the anniversary of the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw ghetto during World War II and the 60th anniversary of the birth of the state of Israel.

Recently, a columnist for the Jerusalem Post wrote that Passover, the festival of freedom, represents

"everything we are proud of: survival against the odds; national identity; and a return to the Promised Land."

I say to my friends, colleagues and constituents, that Passover is a very special holiday. It unites families through cherished tradition. I send my best wishes to all.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendments:

Bill 44, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 44, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Michael Bryant: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that notwithstanding standing order 96(g), the requirement for notice be waived with respect to ballot item 18.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Agreed to.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to take this opportunity to welcome a few guests to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the member from Nepean–Carleton, we'd like to welcome Gerry Coyle, who is the son of Toronto Star columnist Jim Coyle. He gets to observe from the press gallery today.

On behalf of the member from York Centre, we'd like to welcome the students from St. Raphael Catholic School, who are located in the west public gallery today.

On behalf of page Marcus Glennie, seated in the east members' gallery are Maria Iannuzziello, his mother, and Michael Smith, his stepfather.

On behalf of page Victoria Jennings, in the west members' gallery: Liz Morrison, her mother, Richard Jennings, her father, and Samantha Jennings, her sister.

On behalf of page Lucas Bongers, I would like to welcome the relatives who were looking after him while he was here in Toronto: Maria, Albert and Alistair Thorburn.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity and ask all members to join me, as this current group of pages is completing its session. I'd like us all to show our appreciation for the great work they have provided to both members and staff for the past three weeks.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I had hoped the Minister of Community and Social Services would have been here.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Can you please stop the clock? Is the Minister of Community and Social Services on her way?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): She's on her way. If you'd like to stand down that question right now, please, we can take your next lead. Could you reset the clock to the full hour, please?

I'll recognize the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Deputy Premier: It appears that the Dalton McGuinty recession has now hit the province of Ontario, and the region of Ottawa in particular. Sadly, we heard that yesterday Dell announced that its Ottawa call centre will close, putting more than 1,100 people out of work.

The University of Toronto's Institute for Policy Analysis has announced today that now Ontario is in a Dalton McGuinty recession. The finance minister tried to deny this; the Premier has tried to deny this.

Hon. George Smitherman: I don't think U of T said that.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, I ask the Deputy Premier if Ontario is now in a recession—which should be called the Dalton McGuinty recession, as it's the only one of its kind in all of Canada.

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

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Hon. Dwight Duncan: There's no doubt that the Ontario economy faces challenges that are being felt throughout North America. In fact, that report wasn't released today or yesterday; it was released two days ago. Those challenges are related to the world price of oil, the state of the US economy and the strength of our dollar. So the member is right: There is no question that there are challenges in the economy. That's why our government has undertaken a series of policies that are designed to respond, as the provincial government can, to areas such as skills training, infrastructure and innovation, recognizing, as the University of Toronto study did, that this is not a challenge that is unique to Ontario and not a challenge that is within the purview of Ontario to solve. What is important is that the government respond with a multi-pronged approach to the economy, to the challenges within that economy, recognizing that our businesses and workers are among the best in the world.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't think the minister's answer will be any comfort to the 1,100 workers and their families in the Ottawa area that just got the pink slip as part of the Dalton McGuinty recession. It now appears that the job layoffs have expanded from the manufacturing and forestry sector into the high-tech industry and into the Ottawa region. The Dell announcement is irrefutable proof that this government's high taxes, runaway spending and increasing red tape are causing jobs to flee this province at a record pace.

I ask the finance minister, when will you get it? When will you realize that your tax-and-spend policies are bringing real harm to working families in Ottawa and across the province of Ontario? Will we see a change of course from this government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government is concerned when any Ontarian family loses a job, loses its livelihood. There are far too many people who have experienced that. I would remind the member, however, that over the course of the last year we've seen a net increase in employment of 101,000 people in well-paying jobs. While there are no doubt challenges associated with what is going on in the economy, and as long as one Ontario family faces uncertain prospects, this government won't rest. I would remind the member that this government has a five-point plan.

We reject their idea. They want business tax cuts. Well, that's happening in Ottawa, yet nationally we're seeing a decline in the economy. So we reject that. The plan we laid out in our budget is the appropriate response, recognizing the needs of those families and communities that are experiencing the challenges in our economy.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You would think that the 1,100 job losses at Dell in the Ottawa region would be a wake-up call for the Dalton McGuinty government. When the Premier spoke to the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce on September 30, 2005, he was more than pleased to brag about how he personally brought these jobs to the province of Ontario. Well, it took just over two years for Dalton McGuinty to close that down and put 1,100 people out of work with his high taxes, runaway spending and increased red tape. He wants to claim the glory, but he says, "I had nothing to do with the increase of job losses across the province."

I remind the minister that Ontario has the slowest rate of job creation in all of Canada, and now we hear about part of a Dalton McGuinty recession in Ontario. How many more jobs in Ottawa or in Ontario have to go before you reverse the course and start to reduce the tax burden on working families and Ontario businesses?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The government of Ontario has one of the most supportive tax policies to high-tech business anywhere in North America. Let me just read to the member, who is up on his high horse again today, from the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation's most recent release with respect to technology jobs. According to their annual technology employment survey, "A 3% increase in technology jobs brings the total number of people employed in the advanced technology sector in Ottawa to 81,910—the highest recorded employment number yet."

We do empathize and care deeply about those families that lose their jobs. That's why we've laid out a plan that is about more than tax cuts for big business. It's about helping families and individuals face the challenge of our economy.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Under Bill 183, the former adoption disclosure bill, you had special protection for children who were severely abused, and were taken from their parents and subsequently adopted out through the children's aid society.

Yesterday, you gave the impression that the Information and Privacy Commissioner might be against my amendment and those sections which you removed from that act. The privacy commissioner has said she has no objection to those amendments or to the sections of the act that protected these kids before. In fact, she says she strongly supports privacy protections, especially for vulnerable persons or groups.

Fifty-three children's aid societies support my amendment. Minister, who doesn't support this amendment?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand the concern of the member of the opposition party, but there are indeed existing mechanisms in our new adoption bill that address the concerns raised by the member. All adoptee adults—they are not children—can still submit a no-contact notice, and there is a $50,000 fine attached to it.

The three provinces that have this legislation in place, and this no-contact provision in their bills, have not had one violation of this provision. So I think this provision does protect those whom the member is concerned about.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Minister, yesterday you told the Queen's Park press gallery outside that the sections with regard to the protection of these children were

rejected by the Superior Court of Ontario and were made null and void. That is patently wrong. Those sections—48.9 and 48.10—were not nullified by the Superior Court of Ontario.

Have you, in fact, read the decision or your legislation? Do you understand the lack of protection you are providing for these abused children?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: No one in Canada is doing what the honourable member is asking us to do. No province that has introduced legislation to open adoption records has included a determination-of-abuse clause in addition to a no-contact notice.

In Alberta, Newfoundland and British Columbia, they have this provision in their acts, and their fine is not $50,000; it's $10,000. British Columbia has had this piece of legislation in place for the past 10 years. There has not been any violation in British Columbia, Alberta or Newfoundland.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: We know that the last thing in the world that the people who have been abused—children who have come of age—want is to be entangled in legal proceedings with an abuser or somebody who has acted criminally against them.

Our justice system would never, never provide a perpetrator of crime—a rapist, a person who had attempted murder, a person who had committed a serious assault—with identifying information about the victim. What makes this different? Why is a victim of incestuous rape any different from any other victim in our province? Why shouldn't we put control in the hands of the victim and not in the hands of the abuser? You are making it a legal right for an abuser to get identifying information about a child they may have attempted to murder or rape—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, this province is not different from British Columbia, Alberta or Newfoundland. They have this provision in their acts. They have open adoption, like we are moving forward with, and there has not been one violation.

I would have liked this member on the other side to have had the same concern about the well-being of our children when they, under their mandate, cut social assistance by 22%.

1400

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Yesterday, in the Premier's hometown of Ottawa, Dell announced that it is closing its call centre, leaving another 1,100 hard-working Ontarians jobless. Through the McGuinty government's jobs plan—if you can call it that—we understand that Dell received an annual tax credit of $5,000 for each of these jobs: in excess of $11 million. Is this the McGuinty government's real jobs plan: big cash for corporations that lay off workers, and workers get the layoff slip?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The McGuinty government's plan is to work with every industry in this province to help protect working people in Ontario. The member opposite and his party have put forward ideas, for instance, including a manufacturing tax credit, which is an idea that has some merit in terms of encouraging jobs here in Ontario.

We take a variety of perspectives on these jobs, which are relatively high-paying because they do require highly skilled people who can answer very technical questions. We will continue to work with industry through a variety of taxation and fiscal initiatives that are designed to enhance the ability of companies to do business here in Ontario and therefore to keep more Ontarians working.

As long as one Ontario family continues to look for work, continues to worry about their work, this government will continue to stand with them with a variety of tools aimed at improving the economy.

Mr. Howard Hampton: What workers see is that a large corporation gets millions of dollars in tax credits from the McGuinty government and then leaves town and leaves 1,100 workers high and dry.

It's not just those workers. The Institute for Policy Analysis at the University of Toronto says that Ontario's economy is officially in a recession. Economists at the institute say that Ontario's economy will shrink by 0.5% in the first half of this year.

With jobs vanishing by the thousands, will the McGuinty government admit that the Ontario economy is in recession and that, furthermore, this government has no plan whatsoever to take on that recession and help sustain jobs?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It's interesting to hear the leader of the third party argue against governments investing in skills training, because that's what we did at Dell.

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It is bizarre.

We provided Dell employees with $11 million over the last three years and created two new trades.

I recognize that the member may not have heard the president and CEO of Pronexus, Gary Hannah, when he said this morning on CFRA Ottawa, "I'm not sure how many we can absorb, but Pronexus will definitely be part of the solution."

By training these individuals, by investing in their skills, we help them to adjust in a very difficult circumstance. We will continue to invest in training because that's what helps working men and women and that's what's important to the future of our economy. Unlike the NDP, we wouldn't stop providing skills training.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the only real skills training here is Dell finding the skill to make off with a lot of public money while the workers find themselves unemployed.

Here is the reality. The growth forecast of this government of 1.1% is obviously far off the mark. The Institute

for Policy Analysis says that unemployment is going to rise by at least 0.5%. That means tens of thousands of more workers. Economist Don Drummond says that Ontario will have zero growth for all of 2008. Other governments that are more activist are doing much better.

Why is the McGuinty government being so reckless and irresponsible by ignoring the fact that tens of thousands of workers in Ontario are losing their jobs under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There is no doubt the economy faces challenges and that far too many people are looking for work in this province, and that's why we're investing in skills training; that is why we're investing in infrastructure; that is why we're working with the CAW and other unions to incent the automotive parts sector to locate in Ontario; that's why we're investing in innovation; that's why the unemployment rate, in spite of these challenges, is lower than when we came to office; that's why 101,000 net new jobs were created last year.

There is no doubt that as this year progresses we face challenges. The solutions we've offered up are the appropriate solutions in those circumstances, recognizing that the state of the US economy, the price of oil and the value of our dollar will clearly affect all growth in Canada.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Deputy Premier. I gather the McGuinty government is happy that Dell gets lots of tax credits and workers get unemployment.

Deputy Premier, this morning Graham White, a leading expert on the workings of this Legislature, said that your government's plan to change the timing of question period seriously undermines the opposition's ability to hold the government to account. Specifically Professor White said, "Moving question period into the morning would severely undercut its effectiveness." Is Professor White wrong?

Hon. George Smitherman: The government House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Obviously Professor White is a very respected academic, not only in terms of his scholarly experience but because of his personal experience. His contribution to this debate is very important, and I certainly take his comments very seriously.

I would say that there are question periods across the Commonwealth that do begin in the morning. In the United Kingdom, question period one day is at 10:30, on another day it is at 11:30; in Saskatchewan, one day question period is at 10 a.m.; and in the federal Parliament, on Fridays, it begins in the morning as well. There is a significant amount of variation in terms of the way question period is held in a number of jurisdictions. I understand that there is an ongoing debate about this issue, and I look forward to the debate continuing.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The government House leader would know that across Canada federally and in the territories and the British House of Commons, the vast majority of question period time is in the afternoon and it's there for the a reason. It is there so that there is time to prepare the questions and there is time to fact check so that question period is effective in terms of holding governments accountable. Professor White made it clear. He said that good questions require adequate time to research and fact check and that removing four hours of question period preparation would do serious harm in terms of holding a government accountable.

So tell me, when the rest of Canada says question period should be held in the afternoon so you can hold governments accountable, why does the McGuinty government want to push it in the morning, when it becomes very difficult to do the kind of fact checking and to make the kinds of contacts you need in order to hold the government accountable?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Question period in the House of Commons in Westminster currently takes place, yes, at 2:35 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays, but 11:35 a.m. on Wednesdays and 10:35 a.m. on Thursdays, and they are written questions. In Saskatchewan, it begins at 10 a.m. on one day and question period is shorter. In the federal Parliament, there is a morning question period, and question period again is different. There are different forms of question period in different jurisdictions. In this jurisdiction, we have the longest question period in the country.

I appreciate what the member is saying with respect to research that goes into questions. I'm very aware of that. I recall doing the same when I was in opposition. I would remind the member that the government and opposition members are doing that to prepare for caucus and cabinet scrums twice a week, on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, as well.

1410

Mr. Howard Hampton: It's interesting to hear what the government House leader cites.

British Columbia question period: afternoon; Alberta question period: afternoon; the majority of Saskatchewan question periods: afternoon; Manitoba: afternoon; Quebec: afternoon; New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland: afternoon; the federal House of Commons: afternoon, except for one morning.

Professor White is very clear. He says that no other Legislature in Canada or the UK schedules their question periods in the morning, as the McGuinty government wants to do, and he says that is because if you want to have an opportunity to hold governments accountable, you need the time to do the research, you need the time to do the fact checking, and the media needs the time to follow up as well.

So, I ask this: What is the McGuinty government afraid of? When every other Legislature in Canada is prepared to allow time to fact check—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Government House leader?

Hon. Michael Bryant: It is very refreshing to hear that the leader of the third party feels he needs time to fact check; we agree.

In fact, Professor White did not say that every single question period, on every single day, in every jurisdiction, is in the afternoon. It is not the case.

I understand that is change. I understand this is different than the way in which we have been doing it in the past. I understand that tradition has said that question period will take place in the afternoon. This is proposing a different system, which I would argue provides for more access to the executive council, number one; secondly, it l provide access before noon, giving an opportunity for the opposition parties to do the rebuttals and fact checks and other opinions that currently cannot take place.

Professor White also said that the quality and quantity of question period is in the eye of the beholder—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTES

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Deputy Premier about the native protests that are now paralyzing developments in the city of Brantford.

I'll quote the mayor of Brantford, from an April 15 article in the Brantford Expositor: "Almost every day a business or the city receives demands and then threats if they fail to comply with those demands.... People are being hurt by this. They're losing jobs and could see their taxes go up."

Deputy Premier, you sat back and did nothing for the people of Caledonia until it was too late to save the businesses and homes. Brantford has begun to hit its stride after some downturns, and now that is being halted as would-be investors are being intimidated and turning away.

What is this government going to do to assist with the specific costs to the municipalities associated with this situation, such as policing?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I appreciate the member's question. It's interesting, though, that the member didn't ask that question yesterday. I'm wondering if in fact the member was uncomfortable with expressing concerns about the activity of First Nations people while chiefs were sitting in the audience. It's odd that the member didn't ask that question yesterday. You ask it today, and here is my answer.

We are in ongoing conversations with municipal councils and mayors. With respect to the particular municipal council that the member is making reference to, I can say that the MPP for Brant—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just would ask the Minister of Finance to withdraw the comment, please.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I withdraw.

Hon. Michael Bryant: We are in ongoing conversations with the mayor and council, as we continue to discuss ways in which we can assist that municipality.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I find that some of the minister's response was quite inappropriate.

Anyway, back to Brantford, which is the main part of the question here.

Brantford's local government home and business owners are watching their potential prosperity disappear because this government refuses to deal with the native protests that are hurting the social fabric and confidence in that city and frightening away new investors.

Branford city council passed a resolution on Monday night to the Premier demanding "financial compensation for lost businesses, lost tax revenue and extra policing costs." This is all caused by the escalating protests at development sites in Brantford.

The Premier set the precedent in Caledonia, agreeing to millions in compensation to residents and businesses. Will this government agree to a similar compensation package for the residents and businesses of Brantford?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Working with First Nations leaders with respect to particular claims and with respect to changing the claims process is part of the broad set of issues that the member is raising with this question. That is something that is happening right now, and in my conversations with the federal minister of Indian affairs, we have agreed that we are having our ministries work together to try and improve the claims process.

Often, and certainly in the case of Haudenosaunee Six Nations, we are talking about disagreements and claims more than a century old and that primarily involve a disagreement or a claim, or a discussion in negotiation between the federal government on the one hand and First Nations on the on the other hand.

Be that as it may, that certainly does not stop the MPP for Brant, Mr. Levac, from doing the good work that he does to try and bring the community together, to try and work out solutions and assist the municipal council.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Education. Four schools in Sault Ste. Marie are under school closure review. There are 17 in Durham. Limestone District School Board is reviewing five elementary schools. There is also one in Sarnia. These are but four school boards among many that are facing school closures. Meanwhile, Charles Pascal is considering kindergarten programs out of schools for lack of space. Why would you consider closing schools, when we'll need them to expand junior and senior kindergarten to full-time, as you promised?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member for the question. I know that the member opposite understands the way demographics shift, the way people move and populations change. The fact is that in Ontario, we're confronting significant declining enrolment over the next

few years and have been for the last couple of years. In fact, this year, 68,000 fewer students are in our schools. By next year, there will be upwards of 90,000 fewer students in our schools.

We've been investing $465 million since we came into office in the face of that kind of declining enrolment. We've also shifted the funding formula away from a strictly per pupil formula to guarantee that small schools would have principals and secretaries. We've made those changes, but at the end of the day, school boards need to have the authority to make the changes based on the program that's best for their students that they need for their communities. That's the reality of the way school boards work in this province.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Your solutions to declining enrolment have been completely inadequate. Good schools integral to communities are still closing: 2010 is two years too late to set up a review. It will be too late to save many of the schools that are closing.

I will ask you what Dalton McGuinty asked Elizabeth Witmer in June 2002. He said: "Does it not make sense to impose a moratorium on school closures, at least until you have reviewed the funding?"

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Between 1998 and 2003, when the Conservative government was in office, there was an increase of 50,000 students in Ontario and 500 schools closed. Under the NDP, 155 schools closed. The reality is that schools open and schools close based on the decisions at the local level.

What we've tried to do is make that process more rational, so we've put in place pupil accommodation review guidelines that allow boards to make decisions based on the value of the school to the community and on program. By providing the resources to keep schools open when boards deem them viable, we've allowed boards to have a much more rational process. That's our responsibility. We're also putting in place a declining enrolment task force because we recognize that over the next decade, it's going to be very important in our communities to take a look at how we help boards deal with declining—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1420

SPORTS FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. With the 2008 Summer Olympics just around the corner, I think it's important to highlight the personal sacrifices that Ontario athletes make.

Most athletes today are students putting themselves through school or college or university. They train every moment that they have with determination and with drive. In fact, years ago my sister was one of those.

However, a comment often made to me by high-performance athletes is that they need all the support they can get from the government. Political and business leaders often express the need to support our athletes. Could the minister tell the House how Ontario is addressing the financial challenges faced by our province's high-performance athletes?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I would like to thank the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for his question. Our government recognizes the sacrifices that Ontario athletes make. After many years of decreased funding for sport, our government established the Quest for Gold program in 2006. In our 2008 budget, we reconfirmed our support for Ontario's athletes by committing $10 million to Quest for Gold. This brings our total investment to $32.9 million. More than 8,000 athletes have benefited from the Quest for Gold program. Each athlete receives between $3,600 and $7,300.

When we launched the program, it represented the first time in 15 years that amateur athletes had received direct—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Bob Delaney: In our own community of Mississauga–Streetsville, athletes from both the Ontario field hockey team and the Ontario Track and Field Association have benefited from the direct funding to support their training through Quest for Gold, but athletes of all types complain about the lack of high-performance training facilities. When they travel to other provinces, they often see the tremendous support that athletes in other provinces receive.

Minister, could you please share with the House what support Ontario is providing to high-performance athletes to allow them to train with exceptional coaches and compete at their best?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I could not agree more with the member from Mississauga–Streetsville. Athletes need outstanding facilities to train in. That is why just last week I made an important $2-million announcement about a partnership between our government and the University of Toronto. This funding will provide high-performance athletes access to use the new state-of-the-art facilities and sport medicine services at the University of Toronto's Varsity Centre. And just today I had the great pleasure of being with inspiring athletes to announce our government's investment in the Canadian Olympic Committee's Road to Excellence program. Alex Baumann is executive director of Road to Excellence, and he said today, "Thank you to the Ontario government for their leadership"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Mr. Speaker, 1,100 high-tech workers lost their jobs at Dell.

Interjection: Who's the question to?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's to the finance minister; I was getting there. Another 250 will be laid off in the same

business park by Citel this June. This is devastating to the city of Ottawa: 1,350 people will be out of a job and on the unemployment line this summer because of your lack of planning, your high taxes and your big government spending.

Will the finance minister stop killing the high-tech sector and cut business taxes so we won't lose any more jobs in the city of Ottawa?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It is difficult for any family or community to lose jobs; there's no question. The government of Ontario is here to offer support. In fact, our training, colleges and universities rapid response team is already out. We have invested in skills training, and we'll continue to invest in skills training to help those workers adjust.

For instance, in this year's budget, which you voted against, we have $1.5 billion for skills training, which we think is important to respond to situations like this. We don't agree with you that a cut in corporate taxes for a big oil company is going to help those workers. What we think we need are investments in skills training and investments in infrastructure, and to continue to work through the high-tech sector; for instance, on the various tax incentives that we have given them that you voted against. We think that's the proper response.

We'll continue to work with the community and with the individuals affected because this government cares and gets it. That's why we're working with them.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: While I support apprenticeship tax credits, it's a hard pill to swallow when you learn that Dell got up to $4.2 million in apprenticeship tax credits just so they could lay people off. Ian Graham, a high-tech management consultant in Ottawa writes that the cancellation of the LSIF "has done a huge disservice to early stage, knowledge-based businesses in Ontario." Debbie Weinstein, whom I spoke with earlier today—a leading high-tech lawyer and former chair of OCRI—told CTV, "The Liberals don't treat high-tech fairly."

Will the finance minister heed the warnings of Ottawa's high-tech pundits and explain to this House why he created a crisis in high-tech by not properly planning a transition from LSIF, particularly now that we're in a recession because of his big spending and his high taxes?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would point out to the member opposite that we're eliminating corporate taxes for high tech in terms of new investment in Canadian technology. Those are the appropriate responses. We are investing in skills training. We are investing in infrastructure. We acknowledge and agree that any family that faces unemployment, any family faced with the kinds of challenges that those families at Dell are faced with, deserves a government that gets it and supports it. That's why we're moving on skills training. That's why we're investing the way we're investing.

We reject your solution of corporate tax cuts for big oil companies. We want to invest in high tech. We want to invest in infrastructure. We want to invest in education. I just wish that that member wouldn't have voted against the very programs that are going to help those people from Dell, who unfortunately lost their jobs this week.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Deputy Premier. The government has been saying for months that public consultations on a poverty reduction plan will begin this spring. The anti-poverty activists are waiting; the poor are waiting; this Legislature is waiting. Why won't the Deputy Premier tell us when those consultations will start and where they'll be held?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do know that my colleague, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, who's chairing our government's cabinet initiative on this, would be pleased to offer more information to the honourable member. I regret that I don't have at my fingertips all of the detailed information that he seeks, but I can tell the honourable member that, as a member of that committee, the committee has been incredibly engaged in helping to develop the appropriate framework for those conversations, the initiative to be out and working with the wide variety of groups in the province of Ontario who share our government's and, I think, the Legislature's desire to make improvement on this—the groups that we intend to be in conversation with.

For my own part, I certainly look forward to the chance to participate in some element of that engagement strategy. More information will be forthcoming to the honourable member and I'll endeavour to get a message to my colleague to make sure that she's aware of the honourable member's specific interest.

Mr. Michael Prue: To paraphrase Ogden Nash, "Spring has sprung, the grass is ris; I wonder where the consultations is?" Why won't this government show Ontarians that it really wants a serious public dialogue on poverty by committing to hold province-wide consultations that will be widespread, accessible and immediate? That's what we want to know.

Hon. George Smitherman: I wish I had the capacity to respond with some poetic reference to the honourable—

Interjection: We'd take any response.

Hon. George Smitherman: Yes, evidenced by your—well, I won't say that.

I want to say that we thank the member very much for his interest. This is shared, of course, by Ontarians broadly and by all members of this Legislature. I can assure the honourable member that in the time since the Premier took the leadership to strike the poverty committee, many, many members of our government have been working very, very vigorously to develop the very plans that the honourable member is looking for. We've been very encouraged, for sure, by the widespread enthusiasm of groups in the province of Ontario to be involved in that engagement. That information is

specific, so what the honourable member is looking for will be available in very short order.

1430

CULTURAL PROTECTION

Mr. Dave Levac: My question is for the Minister of Culture. There are various ways in which cultural industries help us as a province to develop and grow. They innovate, they create and they participate right across the province.

Over the last few weeks, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission has held hearings to examine the current CRTC policies and regulations. I understand, as most people do, that there's a lot at stake at these hearings, and decisions could have a huge impact on our cultural industries. I ask the minister, what is the government doing to advocate on behalf of the cultural industries at the CRTC? If you could fill us in with some of that discussion that you had at the CRTC, it would be greatly appreciated.

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I thank my colleague and the honourable member for his very informed question. It is a vital issue for all of us, and particularly for my department. Our entertainment and our creative industries contribute almost $20 billion to Ontario's GDP. We are the third-largest by employment in North America, after California and New York. This sector is growing faster than the overall economy.

The Ontario government has a very ambitious agenda to ensure growth in this creative sector by investing in infrastructure and technology and by fostering innovation. It is for those very reasons that, as a member of this government, as Minister of Culture, I made a submission to the CRTC hearings on Tuesday, in Ottawa, on behalf of Ontario's cultural industries.

Mr. Dave Levac: Contrary to some of the heckling that was going on on the other side, thinking that this is some kind of joke, this is serious business. Thank you very much, Minister, for telling the House that you did appear before the CRTC.

Interjections.

Mr. Dave Levac: You can hear the heckling.

I understand that you were the only member of any government in Canada to present. I thank you for the passion that you have. Ontarians and Ontario's cultural and creative industries will be pleased to hear, subsequent to those guys on the other side, that the sector is both critical and crucial to the quality of life and an important economic driver in our province. Indeed, the Canadian television content has played a vital role in maintaining the cultural identity of our country and our province.

Minister, can you please tell the House what you did recommend to the CRTC panel at those recent hearings so that the opposition can understand that this is an important topic and an issue to be serious about.

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'm not sure I could add a great deal in my response to the excellent question, and the excellent comprehension by my colleague of the importance of this issue. As he has tried to settle the opposition, I will also join him in that task because I think the point he has made is vital.

When the chair of the CRTC opened the hearings and looked at me, he made his thoughts very clear. He said, "Madam Minister, you are the only legislator in the country who has come forward to this commission." I think the reason he made that comment was because he understands, as does my colleague, as does this government, the tremendous political impact of those hearings and the tremendous economic impact on our province. So let me just say quickly that our argument was that the CRTC, the commissioners, continue to ensure that their policies reinforce Canadian content.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, on March 26 the Premier told this House that he would personally look into the matter of Ontario's artificially high journeyman-to-apprentice ratio, which, as you know, is denying thousands of young people apprenticeship positions in the electrical, plumbing, sheet metal, carpentry and stonemason trades. Given that it's been almost a month since the Premier promised to look in to this matter, can you tell us what's being done to fix the problem?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the interest on the other side of the House in skilled trades in this province. We have a wonderful story to tell. We have approximately 110,000 apprentices currently being trained in Ontario. That's 50,000 more than in 2003. I think all of us were pleased with the $1.5 billion that was contained in the budget, a portion of which is particularly geared to apprentices.

As the honourable member is aware, when it comes to the issue of ratios, all governments have left that to the PACs, the provincial advisory committees, which are made up of experts in the field—employers, apprentices and people who work in the field—to come forward with guidelines. In terms of the question that was asked at the time of the Premier about electricians, the PAC has been specifically tasked to look at the issue of ratios.

Mr. Jim Wilson: The local committees are controlled by big business and big labour. That is exactly what the Canadian Federation of Independent Business told our small business critic, Mr. Miller, yesterday.

I don't understand. You've lost a whole pile more jobs in Ottawa today in the high-tech sector. You've lost over 200,000 manufacturing jobs. Nine other provinces and territories have a 1 to 1 ratio. We need stonemasons; we need electricians. You've got thousands of small business employers who want to hire more apprentices. It could help your government. You would look good, you would help the economy and you would help these thousands of young people who have to work for five years with a journeyman. For example, an apprentice has to work with

a fully licensed electrician for five years in order to get a job. So why won't you make this small regulatory change and help these young people?

Hon. John Milloy: Perhaps it might be interesting to share with the House—the honourable member mentions construction and maintenance electricians. Under our watch, new registrations in this field have increased by 32% since 2003, completion rates have increased by 151% since 2003, and active apprentices have increased by 20% since 2003.

I'm proud of our record. I'm also proud that when it comes to ratios, we've listened to the advice of the committees. I'll give some examples. Under our watch, ratios have been changed for brick and stonemasons, architectural glass and metal mechanics, ironworkers—structural and ornamental—and sprinkler and fire protection installers. I'd like to point out that when they were in office, not one single ratio was ever changed.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a question to the Minister of Health. Why is the McGuinty government forcing 35-year-old colorectal cancer victim Kevin Bigford to rely on community fundraisers to pay for his Avastin treatment?

Hon. George Smitherman: I appreciate the honourable member's question and the interest in patients in the province of Ontario.

With respect to the provision of drugs related to cancer treatment, over the last four years, our investments in drugs for cancer treatment have gone up by 300% or 400%. But indeed, I've always been clear to say that there will be new drug products which emerge which we are not always going to be in a position to be able to support.

On the particular patient matter, I can't speak to that. But on the particular matter of Avastin, I can tell the honourable member that there continues to be dialogue ongoing between the officials in the ministry who make these decisions and the company. Though I don't have further information to offer today, we're hopeful that those conversations might be able to lead to a subsequent listing.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Avastin was approved by Health Canada way back in 2005, and then by British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Newfoundland. Why does this government continue to turn its back on Kevin Bigford and other colorectal cancer patients? Why do they have to wait, when people in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Quebec don't?

Hon. George Smitherman: Similar questions would be possible in other jurisdictions, speaking about the government of Ontario's funding decisions with respect to particular drugs. Lucentis, as an example, is a drug that the honourable member will know that we've recently added, with considerable additional cost, to the Ontario drug formulary to enhance our repertoire of weapons in the fight against disease.

As I mentioned in my earlier answer, this is a drug that is under active consideration. We had asked the company to supply us with what additional information they might have had.

I do want to remind the honourable member that I've always been very clear to say, as it relates to drugs and cancer drugs in particular, that there will be new drugs which come along from time to time that we're not in a position to be able to support. Our expansion of support in this area has been 300% or 400% over the last several years. I do think that, under reflection, that record stands very, very positively, considered with the honourable member's opportunities when he was in government.

1440

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Mario Sergio: My question is for the longest-serving Minister of Health. The government of Ontario has made a commitment to more than 100 hospital capital projects, some of which are under construction and the rest will be under way in the next few years. While this is good news for our health care system, these facilities require additional staff, especially qualified doctors and new nurses. Since this affects the Humber River Regional Hospital in my riding of York West, I and my constituents would like to know what the government is doing to see that our hospitals have adequate staff to facilitate the increase in demand for health care services.

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member represents a riding that is home to part of the Humber River Regional Hospital family of hospitals, at both the Finch site, with which he is most particularly familiar, and with respect to the replacement of the existing Church Street site. In 2009-10, our government will be investing hundreds of millions of dollars of additional resources to dramatically enhance the quality of the facilities.

At the heart of the honourable member's question is an acknowledgement, of course, that it's the people who make the biggest difference in the quality of the care that is delivered. That's why I'm so gratified to see the improvements in the number of nurses working in the province. Humber River Regional Hospital has taken advantage of the new graduate guarantee and hired 55 new nurses to supplement the ranks of nurses working there. We saw some exciting data this week from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario that demonstrate the growth in the number of physicians practising in the province. This is what gives us confidence that we can continue to add health care facilities, because we have more—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I know that my constituents appreciate how hard the staff at Humber River Regional Hospital work, as well as all our health care providers across this province.

You recently made an announcement about $667 million in new funding for hospitals across the province.

Humber River Regional Hospital in York West received more than $2.6 million in funding for surgeries, MRIs and CT scans, as part of Ontario's wait time strategy. I'm happy to report that in this month's refresh of the wait times website, cancer surgery, cataract surgery, CT scan and knee and hip replacement surgery wait times have decreased at the Humber River Regional Hospital since we started measuring wait times.

Minister, tell me and my constituents how this new investment will benefit staff and patients at hospitals across our province.

Hon. George Smitherman: We want to thank and acknowledge the good work of the front-line staff in administration, who have teamed up with our government to reduce wait times at Humber River Regional Hospital.

The confidence we've gained and the lessons we have learned from the work that has been done in health care across the province of Ontario have earned us the equivalent of a gold star from the Wait Time Alliance. Last week they put out their report, and we got A's across the board. It gives us confidence that, together with the health care system and these partners, we can actually tackle some of the challenges that remain. We think there is tremendous potential to apply the wait times lessons to the challenges in Ontario's emergency rooms. Over the course of the next several years, the government intends to demonstrate, and thereby to build confidence with the people of Ontario, that we can apply these wait times lessons and further reduce wait times, with a particular focus on our emergency rooms. This will be a big part of our focus with Humber River Regional Hospital.

TRUCKING SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Just this past week, a 75-year-old man and a 75-year-old woman were pronounced dead at the scene after a crash involving a dump truck on Highway 400. Two truck drivers are facing charges now. One is charged with two counts of criminal negligence causing death, and dangerous operation of a motor vehicle; the other is charged with dangerous operation.

On April 17, the Minister of Transportation announced here in the House that his government was setting tougher new standards for driver training for beginner drivers. Given the increasing incidence of crashes with commercial vehicles, I want to ask the minister this: Why have you not turned your attention to the need for tougher standards for driver training and licensing of truck drivers in this province?

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, I join the member. I'm sure he and I and everyone in the House express solemn condolences to the family, in particular, of those who were killed in this particular accident.

As he points out appropriately, charges have been laid, charges upon which I cannot make comment, but I can assure the member that, in fact, our attention has been turned to this very matter. There are, as he would know as a former minister, some significant penalties that are available now for those who are in violation of the laws of the province of Ontario. People who engage—and, again, I have to be always cautious not to talk about a specific instance—in dangerous driving are subject to the kind of very strong penalties that he and I would agree are very important and should be applied appropriately, as seen fit by the police, and whatever the courts happen to determine.

I look forward to his supplementary question.

Mr. Frank Klees: The issue that I would ask that the minister address is what appears to be the scandalous state in this province of licensing and training of truck drivers.

In researching this issue, Global News reporter Alex Pierson managed to qualify for her AZ licence after just one week of training and taking a road test in an automatic pickup truck. That, Speaker, qualified her to get behind the wheel of an 18-wheeler, which she did 30 minutes after receiving her licence, and she didn't even know how to shift the gears.

The issue is this: When Alex Pierson tried to contact the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, he refused to answer her call on this issue.

Will the minister report back to this House on what he intends to do and what the government intends to do to address this issue, very serious—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, I want to assure the member first of all that, in fact, action has been taken on this particular issue. I have, on a number of occasions, as you know, been interviewed by the individual to whom you made reference today and have been available to talk about these matters. I think the minister of colleges and universities has conversed about this particular matter as well.

One of the things that will be changing is the actual curriculum that is applied. One of the rules that we will be implementing is the rule that, if you are going to drive an 18-wheeler, for instance, you would actually have to take your test on that 18-wheeler. We're making a number of other changes to the regulations which affect commercial drivers as well, which I think will result in a vast improvement over the days that existed with previous governments and earlier in our reign.

SCHOOL POOLS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. Alex Baumann's hometown of Sudbury is seeing the closure of a pool, Falconbridge pool. In Toronto, it's 39 school and community pools. Why doesn't the minister agree that if she wants to produce Olympic swimmers, she must find a way to keep our community pools open now?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I refer the question to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said in this House in recent days that it's critical, obviously, that kids have opportunities to use sports infrastructure. That's why we have invested in our school system over the last four years. We've invested $4 billion in education. As I said in an earlier question, that's in the face of declining enrolment.

On the issue of the swimming pools in Toronto—and, by the way, the Toronto District School Board is really the only school board that has swimming pools in their school facilities. There are a few in other boards, but the Toronto District School Board has the vast majority of school pools. We've invested $360 million more each year in the Toronto District School Board. There's a $5.4-million program enhancement grant that can be applied directly to the school pools. I really look to the board to make those decisions and set those priorities within the parameters, remembering that they have 31,000 fewer students than when we came into office and $360 million—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

1450

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Frank Klees: This is a petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premier has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings;

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe;

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I'm pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Peter Kormos: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas part-time college workers in Ontario have been waiting for 30 years for bargaining rights; and

"Whereas thousands of part-time college workers have signed OPSEU cards, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board failed to order a timely representation vote; and

"Whereas the Ontario government must immediately make good on its promise to extend bargaining rights to college part-timers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The McGuinty government must immediately pass legislation legalizing the rights of college part-timers to organize, and direct the colleges to immediately recognize OPSEU as the bargaining agent for part-time college workers."

I have affixed my signature.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities;

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms;

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles;

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I'm proud to affix my signature and give it to page Jordynne.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. O'Toole: I'm pleased to present the literally thousands of petitions I'm receiving daily on the issue, which I will present to the Legislature and which read as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its" rightful "place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in this Legislature."

I'm pleased to sign this in support of the many constituents in the riding of Durham and present it to Ida, one of the pages, on her very last day here.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas part-time college workers in Ontario have been waiting for 30 years for bargaining rights; and

"Whereas thousands of part-time college workers have signed OPSEU cards, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board failed to order a timely representation vote; and

"Whereas the Ontario government must immediately make good on its promise to extend bargaining rights to college part-timers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The McGuinty government must immediately pass legislation legalizing the rights of college part-timers to organize, and direct the colleges to immediately recognize OPSEU as the bargaining agent for part-time college workers."

I support the petition and I'm signing it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from the good residents of Toronto.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities;

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms;

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles;

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to present this petition, which was signed by Mrs. Matia Stepanenko, who was confirmed by Pope John Paul II as a child and who came to my office to sign the petition in person. I submit her petition, along with many others. It reads as follows:

"Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

As a proponent of this petition, I am pleased to affix my signature and hand it to page Laura.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas part-time college workers in Ontario have been waiting for 30 years for bargaining rights; and

"Whereas thousands of part-time college workers have signed OPSEU cards and the Ontario Labour Relations Board failed to order a timely representation vote; and

"Whereas the Ontario government must immediately make good on its promise to extend bargaining rights to college part-timers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The McGuinty government must immediately pass legislation legalizing the rights of college part-timers to organize and direct the colleges to immediately recognize OPSEU as the bargaining agent for part-time college workers."

I agree with this and will affix my signature hereto.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Helena Jaczek: This is from the residents of Ajax–Pickering.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East local health integration network board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government—it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

I will be giving this to page Jordynne.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current McGuinty government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its rightful place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislative Assembly every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I am pleased to present this to page Michael Louws from my riding of Durham. He has enjoyed his time here. Thank you very much, Michael.

1500

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: "Children and smoke-Free Cars—Support Bill 11

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

"Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

"Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support 'legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present'; and

"Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico, and South Australia recently joined several jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under."

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have here a petition sent to me by Jean Houghton from the great village of Belmont, Ontario. And of course, Mr. Speaker, you will know that's in the Speaker's riding. We present it on behalf of the constituents who signed it from that riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my signature and thank you very much for the opportunity to present it to you today, Mr. Speaker.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mario Sergio: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support the petitioners and I will affix my signature to it.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

"Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

"Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support 'legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present'; and

"Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico, and South Australia recently joined several jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under."

It's signed by many people from my constituency of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I'll pass it over to page Victoria.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I will have page Prakash deliver it to you, on his last day here.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PAYDAY LOANS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 CONCERNANT LES PRÊTS SUR SALAIRE

Mr. Duguid, on behalf of Mr. McMeekin, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 48, An Act to regulate payday loans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 48, Loi visant à réglementer les prêts sur salaire et à apporter des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

Mr. Charles Sousa: It's an honour to have this opportunity to discuss the merits of the proposed Payday Loans Act, 2008, an important piece of legislation introduced in this House by Minister Ted McMeekin on March 31, 2008. I wish to acknowledge and provide our best wishes to Minister McMeekin, who is recovering well—I'm please to say very well—from cancer surgery. At the time of the introduction, the member spoke plainly and passionately about the need to establish a regulatory framework for the payday lending industry.

It is part of the government's ongoing commitment to protect Ontario consumers and families. The fact is, if this legislation is passed, it will be the most comprehensive of its kind in Canada, and will produce a fair and balanced approach to regulating the industry in Ontario. It would protect thousands of Ontarians from all walks of life, who rely on payday loans from time to time to help them through a short-term financial squeeze.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in the 2007 throne speech, the government made a commitment to begin tackling the substantial challenge of poverty in Ontario. So it is widely expected that a well-considered legislative framework for payday lending that includes limits on the total cost of borrowing would also benefit economically disadvantaged Ontarians who use these loans for emergencies or other purposes. The proposed Payday Loans Act, 2008, is indeed an integral part of this government's intent to undertake the hard process of addressing the sources of sustained poverty in Ontario.

Cyclical debt is one of those sources, and we need to address it as we continue to seek better ways to protect

many of our more vulnerable consumers. There's a priority for us to give all Ontarians a solid understanding of the risks and responsibilities that come with being a consumer. It is a priority for us to give Ontarians the very best consumer information, and we want to make it available to them. It is a priority for us to provide security and confidence in Ontario's increasingly complex marketplace.

This bill would not only address increased public confidence in the integrity of the payday lending industry; it would also further our overall investment in Ontario's capacity for sustained economic growth and continued prosperity. We would achieve both of these goals through a competitive regulatory framework that protects both consumers and investors in our province.

A payday loan is a short-term, small principal instrument loan that is made to borrow upon the guarantee of a postdated cheque or a pre-authorized debit. The payday lending industry fills a gap that currently exists in the short-term lending market, suggesting that mainstream lenders are not very active due to perceived risks posed by the credit standing of those who use payday loans.

Regulating the payday lending industry is no small feat. There are approximately 700 payday loan storefronts in Ontario, accounting for over half of the estimated 1,300 storefronts in Canada. Based on a typical payday loan, these businesses lend at an annualized rate commonly in excess of 750% and sometimes even as high as 1,000%.

If this bill is passed, the maximum total cost of borrowing can be regulated. This legislation would create a licensing regime for payday lenders, create an enforcement regime, establish disclosure obligations and prohibit certain industry practices. It's a win-win situation for both the industry and consumers.

1510

We intend to create a stable, more open environment for persons using payday loans by establishing a limit on the total cost of borrowing for payday loan agreements in Ontario and allowing viable businesses to continue under a new regulatory framework. Most important of all, we intend to uphold our commitment to protect all Ontario consumers who make use of payday loans. Consumers should be able to enter a payday lending shop and be just that: informed consumers, not victims. Consumers need to be educated, empowered and confident in their use of these financial services. This proposed legislation would undoubtedly strengthen Ontario's economy.

Please allow me to provide some of the details inside this comprehensive proposed legislation. First and foremost, we want to build on the progress we've made since August 2007. That is when we required payday lenders to display clear and prominent signage in their stores outlining to customers the total cost of borrowing involved in payday loans. This proposed legislation would solidify our progress to date by creating a regulatory framework that encourages competition, while discouraging the now familiar cycle of debt dependency that can result from these loans, especially for those Ontarians who can least afford it. If passed, the proposed legislation would deliver real and positive changes and increase public confidence in the integrity of this industry.

There are three key elements to this bill that I want to speak to. Yet, before I do, I should take a moment to further recognize the need for this legislation. Last spring the federal government enacted Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, and in so doing, provided provinces with the opportunity to regulate the total cost of borrowing for payday loan agreements. British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have already passed payday lending legislation that meets the requirements for designations under Bill C-26. Our government held consultations last summer to gain needed insight from citizens, advocacy groups and lending officials on the direction Ontario should take in this matter. The message we received was clear: Citizens, advocacy groups and the payday lending industry itself all wanted regulation to create a level playing field.

This bill would act to protect consumers as a comprehensive legislative regime to regulate payday lenders, consistent with Bill C-26 requirements for designation. We were one of the first provinces to take action to protect consumers when we amended the regulations under the Consumer Protection Act, or CPA, in 2002 to provide rules for payday loan agreements, including those clear and prominent signs showing the total cost of borrowing per $100 advanced, certain standardized disclosure in payday loan agreements and an immediate distribution of funds to consumers who entered into payday loan agreements.

In 2007, the consumer protection branch of the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services received 44 inquiry calls and three written complaints concerning payday loans. As a result, 43 proactive field visits were conducted, and of the 24 major payday lending businesses visited at 43 different locations, only eight were found to be in full compliance with the CPA disclosure agreements. This number was far too low and, as a result, lenders looked for clarification and we provided it. We received clear support to seek designations under Bill C-26 to regulate the payday lending industry. Over 75% of those Ontarians who made their voices heard during our extensive consultation processes were in favour of moving in this direction.

We have ensured that the approach taken in this proposed legislation is balanced and consistent with designation requirements under federal Bill C-26. So as you can see, there is a clear mandate and a present need to make this happen now. We have also done our homework in order to properly understand who those Ontarians are that most often use these loan services and why. Payday loan customers are typically younger than the general population, are often educated up to the secondary school level and have average annual household incomes ranging from $35,000 to $41,000. These borrowers have substantially lower household incomes and—key to our focus on Ontario families—are more likely to have dependents.

The reasons these Ontario consumers turn to payday lenders are numerous. Maybe they have poor credit history, or an inability to obtain overdraft protection; perhaps they have credit cards at their limits, or just a short-term need for quick and convenient service. Regardless, we understand that all consumers deserve equal and strong protections from harmful lending practices.

If passed, the act would create a licensing regime for payday lenders to ensure fairness in the provision of payday loans. Licensing would assist in weeding out individuals of questionable background from the industry. A business wishing to work in this type of regulated sector would need to meet stiff criteria in order to do business. Once licensed, lenders who do not follow the rules risk penalties, prosecution and, possibly, revocation of their licence.

This bill would remove dishonest operators from the industry and demand that all payday lenders and loan brokers in Ontario act honestly in the conduct of their business. Licensing payday lenders would immediately provide all users of payday loans with strengthened protections. Businesses seeking to be licensed as payday lenders or loan brokers would have to meet certain criteria, including that they have to be financially responsible in the conduct of their business and that they will operate their business in accordance with law, honesty and integrity.

We can rest assured that, with this proposed legislation in place, consumers can use payday lending services with greater safety and assurance. If passed, we will have the strongest payday lending rules in the country.

This proposed legislation would allow to us have a maximum total-cost-of-borrowing cap to limit the amount payday lenders can charge. We have decided to establish a maximum total-cost-of-borrowing advisory board to consult with the industry, consumer groups and with other experts, in order to recommend to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services what an appropriate limit would be to the total cost of borrowing for payday loan agreements.

Our friends in Manitoba and Nova Scotia are using existing utilities boards to consult and set rates. Saskatchewan will be hiring an independent consultant to advise the province on a total-cost-of-borrowing limit to be prescribed in regulation. For Ontario, setting the maximum limit to the total cost of borrowing for payday loan agreements in the regulation, based on the solid advice and recommendations of an expert board, is the smartest and most advisable route we can find.

The expert advisory board will consult with citizens and the payday lending industry and will come up with a recommendation on a limit to the total cost of borrowing for payday loan agreements. We know that many payday lenders support upper limits on the total cost of borrowing and want active involvement in setting the limits, while still others want less government involvement in the pricing of their service.

This proposed legislation would prohibit a variety of harmful practices that currently exists in the payday lending industry, such as rollovers, back-to-back or concurrent loans, inflated default charges and hidden fees. And the list goes on.

For example, a 23-year-old who makes $30,000 per year and has to use a payday lending company to get through some rough months can easily end up taking one loan after another for weeks on end. This all too often comes about because they could not complete the original loan term, paying an exorbitant interest rate on the original loan while falling into a cycle of debt that is almost impossible to stop.

Under this proposed legislation, payday lenders would be prohibited from making concurrent or back-to-back loans. These are the so-called rollover loans where a borrower takes a loan on a loan and is saddled with sky-high borrowing charges. These industry practices are alleged to be problematic because they increase the borrowing costs to consumers and encourage them to take out loans for which they most often do not have the resources to repay. The proposed Payday Loan Act, 2008, has been designed to prevent the lender from profiting from the borrower's inability to repay their loan.

We have already amended the regulations under the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, to impose specific requirements on payday lenders. The amended regulation requires payday lenders to post information to enable borrowers to compare lending costs, requires specific information to be clearly set out on the first page of the payday loan credit agreement, and requires payday credit agreements to be delivered to the borrower upon entering into the agreement.

1520

The final and perhaps most important element of our proposed legislation is the establishment of the Ontario payday lending education fund. The fund would be used to educate the public, particularly with respect to financial planning, and would result in more informed consumers. Payday lenders and loan brokers would support the fund, as the proposed legislation requires them to make payments to the fund.

The proposed legislation includes several provisions that are designed to protect consumers within the context of particular payday loans. For example, if a borrower takes a loan for $300 but only receives $280 from the lender because $20 goes toward a document/administration fee, this is known as discounting the loan principal. This is a practice used by lenders to hide fees. The proposed legislation would prevent this by making it an offence to request or receive any payments from the borrower of any part of the cost of borrowing prior to the expiry of the loan term. Therefore, if the loan is $300, the borrower receives $300.

A very important part of the proposed legislation is that it recognizes a cooling-off period. The proposed legislation provides borrowers two business days to cancel the payday loan agreement without penalty or costs. The borrower may cancel within the cooling-off period without having to give a reason for doing so.

Where the proposed legislation prohibits a practice, places requirements that must be met when entering into a payday loan agreement, or sets limits to the total cost of borrowing, lenders must adhere to the rules or face the consequences. Where the lender ignores these rules, the borrower would not have to pay the cost of borrowing associated with the payday loan agreement. The borrower would only be obliged to repay the advance received from the lender under the agreement. In short, the payday lender would lose their profit.

This bill would bring clarity, accountability and greater assurance to this industry and its customers. It's as simple as that. However, our work does not end there.

A successful regulatory regime depends on setting clear rules. A successful regulatory regime must enforce the rules—and we will. We will be strict and tough in enforcing the proposed new legislation to safeguard the public interest.

The ministry's consumer protection branch will conduct inspections, investigations, respond to consumer complaints and administer the administrative monetary penalty provisions.

The proposed Payday Loans Act, 2008, provides that licences may be revoked or suspended in specified circumstances or if a licensee contravenes the legislation.

To recap: If the Payday Loans Act, 2008, is passed, payday lenders will have a regulated environment that affords competition and economic growth. Users of payday loans will be protected from harmful industry practices and will have remedies if payday lenders do not follow the new rules.

At this time, I would like to acknowledge all of the hard-working staff at the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. There are many who contributed in the preparation of this bill and, on behalf of the minister, we thank them.

Ontario has led the country in looking at specific protections for consumers who use payday loans. This is an example of how we will continue to lead the country with our good work.

The proposed Payday Loans Act, 2008, most certainly complements the government's efforts to assist the most vulnerable members of Ontario's communities and aligns with the government's priority of strong people and a strong economy.

If the proposed legislation is passed, payday loan customers will be better informed, better able to protect themselves and enabled to make informed choices when it comes to short-term borrowing, and the payday loan industry will have the regulation needed to ensure a level playing field that encourages and supports honest operators and inspires more confidence in consumers. That is good news for all of us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Questions and/or comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a pleasure to support the statements by the parliamentary assistant, whose work in Missisauga South I certainly have to commend. Not merely in a community such as the one the parliamentary assistant hails from, in Clarkson and Port Credit, but even in my own communities of Meadowvale, Streetsville and Lisgar, one of the things that we've seen is the proliferation of these shops and malls that are essentially money stores.

I've gone into a lot of the schools and I've asked the kids, "Has anybody ever used one?" Now, typically the loan is about $300, but, my gosh, the conditions that are attached to it—it seems that you are forever paying it off. When I've explained this to new Canadians and to young people, they've said, "Wow, I had no idea."

What Bill 48 aims to do is to provide a regulatory framework to make sure people understand that if you want to go into a payday loan store, here are the things that you're getting into; it requires the owner of the store to lay out the terms and conditions of the loan; and mainly it prevents the automatic rollover. There's got to be a period in between when one loan expires and another one starts, so that you can't get caught on this treadmill of continually paying interest after interest after interest.

There is a market for these risky loans that are not secured by anything. What this bill aims to do is not to drive the industry out of business or underground, but if they choose to remain in business in Ontario, to make sure that their practices are upfront, they're clear, they're transparent to the user, and that people understand what they are getting into, how to get out of it, and how much it's going to cost.

This bill is long overdue, and I certainly want to commend the parliamentary assistant for all the hard work that he's put into it and all the great work that he does serving his constituents in Mississauga South.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I would like to respond to the opening comments by the parliamentary assistant on behalf of the minister.

First, I think we all in this House wish Minister McMeekin all the best in recovery. Even though we're in different parties, I've had a good relationship with him—as a neighbouring member, by the way, on my west border, the border with Mr. McMeekin's riding.

I'm pleased to see that he has moved forward on payday loans. There's been a number of us in the Progressive Conservative party, as well as the third party, quite frankly, who have called for payday loan legislation. One of the things I had suggested was trying to follow the Manitoba model. The Liberals were a little slow in moving on this. The previous minister decided not to act on it. I'm pleased that Minister McMeekin has.

I'm very much looking forward to my colleague the member from Nepean–Carleton's comments. She's very well versed in this issue and, as you will see, will speak passionately about payday loans and the sectors it impacts.

There are a couple of things I think need to be brought into consideration and debate, and hopefully to committee. The federal government made changes to allow the provinces to set the rates and governance on this sector. I think in doing so, it's important to consult with those who operate in this sector as well as consumers.

The federal move has given the provinces the ability now to bring forward this type of legislation, as Manitoba had done some time ago.

Secondly, I think it's important that you recognize the good actors in the industry, that you try to raise the standards that are there and then shut down the fly-by-night operators. So, as opposed to having the government come in and dictate everything, I think it's important for government to work with industry to ensure that high professional standards are maintained in this sector that delivers services to some folks who don't use banks.

My last comment: Importantly, and I hope the parliamentary assistant will pursue this as well, credit unions are not exempted from this bill. They already have governing legislation that was actually before the assembly not too long ago. I do hope the real concerns of the credit unions are addressed.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I look forward to speaking to this bill. It's of course a reaction to a real bill, a stringent bill that came in with a hard cap, which was Bill 224 that the New Democratic Party brought in and that was not passed by this government.

I just want to correct a misperception that has been put forth in this House. We do not lead in this area at all. In fact, we follow far behind other jurisdictions, most notably Quebec, which has a hard cap of 35% and in which there are no lenders.

1530

Payday lending is a lovely term and I'm going to expand upon it. Really, what we're talking about is loansharking. It's not even legalized loansharking because it is not regulated. What this bill does is consult. It sets up yet another government bureaucracy, yet another committee, to look at something that has been looked at by a number of jurisdictions quite adequately in the States and in Canada. In fact, it will cost the taxpayers about $1.5 million to $2 million just to study what has already been studied to death across this country and across the United States.

Meanwhile, as we study, a host of people across this province will suffer. They will lose their life's savings, they will go into debt, and they do so day after day after day. I will tell you about some of my experiences with some of those people: the hardship; the horror. We're talking about children, we're talking families, we're talking about people who are preyed upon by an industry that anyone with any ethics would see is problematic. I looked up in the dictionary what loansharking is. It is excessive rates of interest. Usury used to be considered over 60%. What we're dealing with here is a usurious business.

I look forward to dealing with this. I look forward to speaking to it for an hour and, quite frankly, onward. We're not letting up and neither is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments? The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I just want to say a few words to commend the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, Ted McMeekin. Despite the fact that he has been in a good and full recovery, and thank goodness for that, he has continued to ensure that this legislation moves forward. I know he did a lot of work prior to his illness as well. We're all looking forward to having him back here for sure, but even in his absence—he may not be in this place—his work is still being carried out through the able work of the member for Mississauga South, his parliamentary assistant, who, as members in this House saw today, is a very able, well educated, informed parliamentary assistant who is doing a great job filling in for the minister, not only today but out in the community. This is a member who has graced us with his baritone voice in this Legislature; when he gets up, he distinguishes himself with that voice. He's a pleasure to listen to, a very articulate speaker. I commend him and thank him for the good work he's done already and for assisting Minister McMeekin in ensuring that his duties have been carried out. You're doing great work in that respect.

I want to comment briefly on this bill. I think it's an important bill that is another example of the McGuinty government's ensuring that we've improved on consumer protection—unlike the NDP, who no doubt are going to offer up some Pollyanna policy of probably zero per cent or something like that and think that's going to work. What that is going to do is drive the industry underground. People in very responsible positions in the area of helping those who are less advantaged are telling us to make sure, when we bring this bill forward, that we do it in a reasonable, fair and balanced way to ensure that we don't drive this industry underground. As a mark of previous McGuinty government legislation, we will ensure that it is fair and balanced and in the best interests of the public, protecting the most vulnerable in our society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Mississauga South has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I very much appreciate the comments made and I recognize some of the concerns that are raised. While this is a financial bill, in many respects it has great emphasis on the poverty agenda. But in fact this is more about the consumer and consumer protection, especially for those most vulnerable.

I should also recognize that we have some key stakeholders here in the House today. In fact, the Honourable Stan Keyes, president of the Canadian Payday Loan Association, who was previously a multiple minister in the federal government, is here in the House today. He and many others share the same concerns to ensure that we have a regulatory environment that enables us to protect consumers and ensure that they don't get caught in a further cycle of debt.

I'd like to quote the minister at this point, and he says it best: "We're not out to employ payday lenders—or destroy payday lenders. We're here to fulfill our mission to protect consumers. Protect them, we will"—Ted McMeekin.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you for your contribution to the debate. Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm pleased to lead off debate of Bill 48, the Payday Loans Act, on behalf of the official opposition. At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, who right now is at home recovering from a very important medical procedure. On behalf of the PC Party and our caucus, I wish him well. I'm very happy that he is recovering.

I would also like to acknowledge his parliamentary assistant, Charles Sousa, who I think did a great job in explaining the need for this legislation.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, you won't be surprised that we do support greater consumer protection with respect to payday loans. This piece of legislation is long overdue. For years now, both the official opposition and the third party have been calling on the Liberal government to introduce legislation that would protect Ontario's consumers from the extremely high cost of borrowing with respect to the payday loan industry. Not only must we protect Ontario's consumers, but payday loans, which do fill a market need, must keep pace with the changing face of the industry in order to remain sustainable and viable. Of course, that means standards of protection must be introduced and adhered to by the industry, so that usurious and criminal rates are not charged to Ontario's consumers.

I must say that this legislation will need to receive public scrutiny. First and foremost, this is about the consumer, but we must also remember that the payday loan market has grown because it fits a niche in the Canadian economy. Whether we personally agree with it or not, it was created for a variety of reasons.

At this time, I'd like to acknowledge the work of two former Progressive Conservative critics and ministers who spoke very loudly on this issue from the get-go. I would like to first recognize my colleague the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, a former minister of consumer protection, and the former MPP for Barrie, Joe Tascona, who both pushed this issue along in the Legislature in the interest of greater consumer protection.

In particular, Mr. Tascona introduced Bill 205, which would have amended the Consumer Protection Act, 2007, to include payday loans. Mr. Tascona's bill, had it been successful, would have established licensing requirements for payday lenders, which the bill before us certainly endorses. It would have prohibited lenders from demanding security for a payday loan. Borrowers would have had the right to cancel a loan for any reason within one business day after receiving the initial advance under the loan, which similarly is carried over in spirit in this legislation. New regulation-making powers would allow the government to set an interest cap. Mr. Tascona's bill was apparently ahead of its time. It is too bad that the Liberals decided to dawdle along when Mr. Tascona's bill had been there all along.

In review, Mr. Tascona's bill, in its explanatory note, says the following:

"The bill amends the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, to add a new part about payday loans. A payday loan is defined as a loan of money with an initial advance of no more than $1,500 and an initial term, ignoring any extension or renewal, that is no longer than 62 days.

"A person is not allowed to offer, arrange or provide a payday loan from any location except if the person holds a licence issued under the act or if the person is employed by a licensee and acts on the licensee's behalf. A licence must specify the location involved. The regulations made under the act can specify the qualifications that a person is required to have and the educational and other requirements that a person is required to satisfy in order to be eligible for a licence. A registrar appointed by the minister issues licences"—again, very similar to what the Liberals have proposed here today.

"The registrar can refuse to issue or renew a licence or can suspend or cancel a licence for a reason specified in the act. If the registrar proposes to refuse to renew a licence or to suspend or cancel a licence, the licensee may request a hearing by the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

"The regulations made under the act can specify a maximum amount for the cost of borrowing in relation to a payday loan. A lender under a payday loan is prohibited from taking security for the repayment of a payday loan. A lender is also required to post signs at each of the lender's business locations setting out all components of the cost of borrowing and other information prescribed by the regulations.

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"A borrower under a payday loan can cancel the loan, for any reason, within one business day after receiving the initial advance under the loan. Upon cancellation, the borrower is required to repay the outstanding balance of the principal under the loan and the lender is required to reimburse the borrower for all amounts paid in respect of the cost of borrowing.

It concludes with: "A lender under a payday loan is required to keep the records that the regulations made under the act specify."

Just as the PC Party saw the need to protect consumers who made financial transactions years ago, we are still supportive of creating industry-wide standards today which will create a more viable industry and a less predatory environment for those who are using payday lending services. My colleague Tim Hudak, the former minister of consumer protection, was one of the first in Ontario to recognize the need for better consumer protection and industry standards in the payday loans field. He said years ago, "Ontario should follow the example set by Manitoba and bring in legislation to establish provincial control." He added that "our best approach is to ... make sure some of the shoddy offices in the industry are shut down."

Before I proceed with the debate, I'd like to take a moment to briefly explain to this House a little bit about the payday loan industry and what it does, particularly for those at home who are watching this debate. A payday loan is an unsecured, small-sum, short-term cash ad-

vance that is payable at or near the time of the customer's next payday. To pay the loan, the customer can either write a cheque or provide authorization for a debit transaction to their account. The average loan is approximately $300. Loans do not involve credit checks. To be eligible for a loan, a person must show that he or she has a steady job, receives a regular paycheque and has a bank account. In addition to loans, payday loan companies may also offer other services, including cheque cashing, advances on tax refunds, money transfers, foreign currency exchange, bill payment and/or money orders.

For years this industry has been unregulated and has charged, in some cases, excessive and unreasonable interest rates. As I review this bill, indeed, the spirit of consumer protection is there. So I would be most hopeful that the spirit of co-operation among members in this Legislature will carry the day on this legislation in the true interests of consumer protection. It is important that our province plays a regulatory role in the payday loan industry.

Obviously, the biggest reason is because the federal government said so. On October 6, 2006, they changed the Criminal Code under section 347 to exempt provinces who introduce legislation that clearly lays out consumer protection measures for payday loan industries and that place a cap on the cost of borrowing. To date, three provinces have established regulatory regimes for the payday lending industry.

In 2006, the government of Manitoba required that payday lenders carry warning signs about the cost of obtaining a loan. The legislation also prohibits the signing over of future wages to loan companies and institutes a 48-hour cooling-off period. The provincial public utility board also recently established caps on borrowing.

Also in 2006, the province of Nova Scotia passed similar legislation to Manitoba and referred the job of rate setting to its utility and review board. An announcement on Nova Scotia's rate is pending. Quebec is expected to maintain the status quo, licensing only those payday lenders who can demonstrate that the cap on the total cost of borrowing does not exceed 35%.

Federal Bill C-26 stated that rate caps should be reasonable enough for a competitive and viable industry but not be so onerous as to gouge consumers. I think that is where we need to be in this debate today and I think my colleagues in the government would agree. This comes as relief, considering that the federal government's regulation of the industry was unsuccessful. Really, it was inadaptable to such short-term lending practices.

Regulating the payday loan industry will also place greater consumer protection ahead of the interests of the fly-by-night payday loan operators, who are the ones we know are scamming hard-working Ontarians. I think that is whom we should be focusing on as we proceed with this debate today. This is also why reputable payday loan companies and the Canadian Payday Loan Association are supportive of industry standards and enhancing consumer choice, among other lending options, such as friends and families, banks, credit cards or store cards. While the majority of payday loan companies are in favour of regulating the industry, it must not be forgotten that the competition within this industry should also be encouraged.

Payday loans provide a financial service that many consumers need and value, whether we personally agree with it or not. As the Canadian Payday Loan Association outlines, "The availability of payday loans means consumers do not need to use more expensive options with less consumer protection, such as pawn shops or Internet loan providers." The CPLA also goes on to state: "Competition among payday lenders is the most effective means to ensure consumers have access to payday loans when they need them and at the lowest possible price."

When discussing the payday loan industry, as it were, I think it is helpful to bring forward research prepared by Canada's most superb research organization, the Library of Parliament. Andrew Kitching of the law and government division and Sheena Starky of the economics division of the Library of Parliament provided parliamentarians and Canadians with a very thoughtful dissertation called Payday Loan Companies in Canada: Determining the Public Interest. The objective and impartial findings of this research team conclude, "The payday loan industry presents an interesting situation for policy-makers, where both the public interest and the best course of action are somewhat unclear." They add an interesting observation in their conclusion: "Criminal prosecution, however, could eliminate the payday loan industry, and in the absence of increased servicing by traditional lenders, leave some consumers without access to credit or the convenience they desire."

That's an important point: "access to credit or the convenience they desire." It means the debate on payday loans is actually about choice; it means there is a demand by free, willing, able and thinking people in Canada and in Ontario. As the Credit Counselling Society wrote to the Honourable Stan Keyes—who I'm very happy is here today; he's a former Canadian Minister of Revenue who is now president of the Canadian Payday Loan Association—"We believe that consumers are better served in a healthy and competitive marketplace instead of a marketplace with few providers."

Later in the letter, Scott Hannah of the Credit Counselling Society writes, "While we are concerned that easy access to credit can potentially create financial difficulties to consumers, regardless of the source of credit (overdraft, line of credit, credit cards or payday loans), it is not practical to create regulations to protect consumers from themselves." He then adds, "I do believe it is up to the consumer to use credit responsibly." I couldn't agree more. That's why I'm supportive of regulating the industry to get the scammers, the bad seeds and the real loan sharks out of the market, but just as the Library of Parliament also pointed out, people in Canada and Ontario want access to the credit or the convenience they desire. It isn't up to us in this chamber to limit people's choice; it is up to us to protect them with a reasonable

regulatory regime and licensing framework, so that the choices they make are not detrimental to them or their financial well-being. It's a delicate balance. We're here today to protect consumer interests by eliminating the fly-by-nighters, but we should all be here with a view to protecting consumer choice as well. After all, it is their responsibility, not the government's and not any member of this Legislature's to tell people how to use their credit and use it wisely.

With the growth of payday loans across Ontario and Canada, we in this chamber would be naive not to acknowledge that the industry is filling a service gap in the financial services sector. In fact, according to the same Library of Parliament research paper I've been quoting, "It is believed the payday loan industry first emerged in Canada in the early to mid-1990s in response to a demand for small-sum, short-term credit." Since that time, the industry has grown rapidly. Currently, it is approximated that there are between 1,300 and 1,400 storefronts nationally, with almost half of those residing here in the province of Ontario.

With a proven demand, I think it is time to frame the debate around the reality, which is that payday loans do serve a niche in the financial service market, whether that so-called niche is the preference of some members or not. We need to focus on the reality of the situation in this chamber. It may not be the first choice of financial transactions for members in this chamber, but for Ontarians in our cities, villages and hamlets, payday loans are part of many of their financial planning days.

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In fact, a survey provided by Pollara to the Canadian Payday Loan Association indicated that a majority of its respondents—payday loan customers—reported that the most important reason for choosing to obtain a payday loan in the past, rather than using another source of financing, was because it was quick, easy and convenient; 51% said that. The second reason for using payday loans was that it was a more convenient location than a bank.

So as I look at the bill in front us, I see an opportunity to protect consumer rights while also protecting consumer choice. The Payday Loans Act, Bill 48, will regulate the payday loan industry. Some of the key provisions include:

—Payday loan providers will be required to hold a licence issued by a registrar who will deal with the compliance and complaints.

—It will set up an Ontario payday lending education fund, requiring all licensees to contribute to the fund, and will educate consumers on their rights and obligations.

—Borrowers will be given a 48-hour period to cancel loan agreements without charge or penalty.

—Payday loan agreements will be required to comply with the cost-of-borrowing limits prescribed within the regulations under the legislation.

—Fines will be established for the contravention of the legislation.

—A three-member, independent advisory board will be established to set the maximum total cost of borrowing, comprised of a business representative, an academic and a social advocate.

While there is no question that this is indeed where the federal government expects us to be going in the context of section 347 of the Criminal Code, and indeed where the legitimate players in the industry and the borrowers of payday loans expect us to be, there are still more questions that need to be answered, and of course the usual concerns and suggestions coming from the official opposition, which I believe will only enhance the bill.

Until we receive substantive public consultation on this legislation, the debate will be confined in this chamber. I hope for the quality of debate that we stick to the facts and the evidence and not resort to the rhetorical and anecdotal. Having said that, I do have a few concerns with this legislation, and I'll outline them very briefly before I go in depth.

I am concerned that the Liberals have made this a social policy bill rather than an economic bill.

I am concerned that the advisory panel might be weighted too far to one side of the spectrum, that it will be heavily influenced by the ministry, and whether or not its recommendations will be binding.

I am concerned that the Ontario payday lending educational fund will be nothing more than bureaucracy and won't really reach anyone who needs to get their circle of debt under control.

If I may, I will begin with the Liberal's decision to call this an "anti-poverty bill." Fundamentally, I believe that whenever this chamber discusses financial matters such as is the case right now, it should be in the context of fiscal, not social policy. I think that the Liberals are doing a disservice to this legislation by lumping it into their anti-poverty agenda, primarily because the bill is now based on assumptions of borrowers that never really have been proven. Secondly, if the Liberals are serious about the root causes of poverty in Ontario, I would think that a stand-alone, thoughtful piece of legislation combating the root causes would actually be more realistic. But then again, I also adhere to the notion that a stronger economy with more jobs and more competition is actually the way to get people out of poverty and into better financial circumstances.

Having said that, I would like to take a few minutes to discuss those assumptions that the bill is based on right now. It's implied that all users of payday loans are poor, uneducated and have horrible credit ratings. That's quite an assumption to make, particularly when you consider that the industry has grown, as pointed out by the Library of Parliament, and that it does create a niche market for those looking for convenience and credit, not solely based on those who are out there who are, unfortunately, desperate.

I stated earlier that I had an opportunity to review polling data from Michael Marzolini, the chairman of Pollara. I must admit that I had never expected to be in this Legislature quoting such a well-known Liberal pollster, someone who, just a week ago, at a breakfast hosted by Enbridge gas, Warren Kinsella had said was

the best Liberal pollster out there. Nonetheless, I do like to read research, I do like to analyze it, and I saw some interesting findings.

The findings certainly fly in the face of the perception that the average payday loan user, whom this Liberal government considers poor, uneducated and with a horrible credit rating—that indeed is not the case. Mr. Marzolini is quoted in a press release saying this: "After years of surveys in the financial sector, I'm surprised by the sophistication and knowledge of payday loan consumers. This data puts to rest a number of widely held misconceptions about the payday loan industry," and goes on to add that the research finally puts evidence before anecdotes.

The survey evidence indicates that a majority of payday loan customers are fully aware of the approximate amount they will pay for all fees, including administration fees and interest charges on their mortgages, savings and chequing accounts and payday loans. Of the payday loan customers, almost four in five reported that they paid back all of the loans they received in the past on time, while only 17 indicated they had paid back most of them on time. This information demonstrates that, contrary to conventional assumptions, the average payday loan customer is employed, educated and not singularly representative of low-income households. Surely, all this information and data prove that the average payday customer is neither poor nor uneducated, contrary to what some here may believe.

I not only reviewed Mr. Marzolini's polling data, but also transcripts of focus groups in Nova Scotia and Manitoba, as they embarked upon their legislation. Consumers there were very forthright; they were also very revealing. One of the questions to the panel implied that people who use payday loans are generally poor, uneducated or don't know what they're doing. The answers were very interesting. One gentleman was a university-educated business entrepreneur who, by his own admission, was very successful, and one woman, was a student at her local college trying to balance her life. But the common answer from both of them as to why they use payday loans was that they were middle-class and making enough money, but things today are expensive.

Of course, Mr. Marzolini's research was conducted with consumers who had borrowed from established members of the Canadian Payday Loan Association, and not from fly-by-nighters, who, I think everyone in this chamber will understand, won't be in business if they continue these serious practices. But to go back: The common answer, when they use payday loans, is that they were making enough money and they were middle-class. It's important to note that the CPLA has a strict code of best practices and does favour regulation in this marketplace so that only legitimate and reputable lenders are doing business in this sector.

Of interest in the research are the demographics of current customers of reputable payday loan institutions. The average age is 39—a little bit younger than you—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —and a little bit older than me. Close to 70% are employed, over 50% have a post-secondary education and they borrow an average of $350 per loan. Furthermore, I found the reasons for borrowing to be quite interesting. Many in the focus group transcripts concurred with the polling data, which suggest that more than half of the customers cite emergency or unexpected expenses, 20% want to avoid service charges or bouncing cheques, 5% want to buy something and only 15% said they had no other option. This is fascinating stuff, and I think that the research is actually more reflective of the fact that this nation has become a credit-based economy, which I think speaks to all ages and income demographics. I don't think we can single out any demographic that's not using a credit card in this country. We have become a nation that has learned to live beyond its means, and to be honest, if you look at this Legislature and the budget we had, this government is living beyond its means. I think that addressing this issue is perhaps what should have been looked at as well.

But it is not just Mr. Marzolini's research—which I'm astonished that I'm actually quoting, but it seems to fit the bill—that highlights findings in the payday loan sector. According to the Daily on Friday, April 20, 2007, "Four in 10 families who borrowed money through payday loans had spending that exceeded their income." That's largely why I think the passing of the bill should have been in the context of a financial plan rather than an anti-poverty plan. The anti-poverty plan should have been tabled during the budget deliberations here, but it wasn't; it was called a pro-spending, pro-taxing plan, which is driving jobs out of the Ottawa economy. I think that 1,300 jobs are leaving the high-tech sector by the end of June, and I just hope that a bank will let them take out a loan, because there won't be a paycheque. But I digress.

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My second concern is the three-member panel. While I'm not opposed to the three-member panel, I do have concerns with it. I would hope that the parliamentary secretary will be able to shed some more light on this. I'm hopeful that they will also consider Ontario-specific information. This is the largest province. It's the most diverse province in the country. The cost of doing business here—thanks to our colleagues opposite—is higher than anywhere else in the country. Wouldn't you agree? You're the finance critic.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I agree.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: He knows.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Excellent point.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: He knows everything.

While there is little doubt that a panel of a social advocate, an academic and a financial sector professional is an interesting choice, it will be incumbent upon our payday loan industry to ensure that there are reasonable caps that protect the consumer, but also ensure that there is a viable industry, because, as the Library of Parliament pointed out, there is a niche market there; there is growth for a reason. Getting people to a reputable organization,

rather than an underground organization, is certainly more important to us. That's what we should be doing here. We should be protecting people. But then again, the fear is obviously of the unknown if people aren't dealing with a reputable organization.

Manitoba, under their Bill 25—their legislation containing consumer protection measures specific to the payday loan industry—had the public utilities board decide how to set the caps on rate fees for payday loans and it ultimately is hurting consumers because they are removing themselves from the market. We must take care so that small and medium-sized companies are not driven out of the business. If there is no payday loan industry or services for the majority who use payday loans out of convenience—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Well, they may go to a bank or they may not use the service at all. But the vulnerable, the truly low-income earners, may choose to go to a loan shark. I think that's what my colleague from Mississauga earlier stated. We certainly don't want that to happen. We don't want to drive people out of the business so they are going to unreputable firms. The viability and sustainability of the industry is the best way to keep predators out.

Finally, I'm concerned that the Ontario payday lending educational fund will just be another bureaucratic nightmare. I'm a supporter of fiscal literacy initiatives and I think we could be doing a better job than a fund that leaves much to be desired in terms of the details. The devil is in the details in this case and right now we don't have a lot of answers.

I think it would behoove the government to consider, with the Minister of Education, a fiscal literacy course, or at least part of a curriculum of math in grades 10 to 12, so that our students know, when they graduate and they get that shiny VISA from Scotiabank, that it's not free money, that they're going to have to pay it back at some point. I think the real root of this—if you want to talk about anti-poverty, I would urge that you consider that type of initiative and get to the kids earlier, so that they're not in this position after they have graduated. After they've graduated, they've got an enormous amount of money on a student loan that they have to pay back. But if they don't get a job or—uh-oh, worse—they had a job, but because of the high business taxes in Ontario their business has closed down, then they don't have a job, they've got high student loans, they've got high credit card debt and before they know it, these kids are just in a cycle of debt.

So we need to get to them earlier. If they're truly talking about anti-poverty and they're truly talking about getting people out of the cycle of debt, then what we need to be doing as a Legislature is considering fiscal literacy educational programs taught in the schools. I'm not saying this has to be a really difficult endeavour.

I just got a note here from our education critic, Joyce Savoline. She is going to knock everyone's socks off in this portfolio, I'm going to tell you. She agrees; we need to be investing in life skills for our students and that includes fiscal literacy initiatives. I think we're missing an opportunity to truly educate the public unless we consider these fiscal literacy courses or at least integrate a fiscal literacy curriculum into existing school coursework.

Teaching children about balancing the books, paying their debts and earning a living can never start too early, when you consider that our economy is slowing and we are in a credit-driven economy. I think it's important now, more than ever before, to teach the next generation about proper financial planning. That's missing in this bill.

If the government is serious, as I mentioned, about the educational component in this bill, they really ought to consider implementing province-wide curricula that include some form of fiscal literacy.

They must also be more clear about how they do plan to fund credit counselling or at least better communicate to those who need it.

Today I received some correspondence from the Credit Union Central of Ontario, which is concerned with this legislation as well. I would like to take a moment just to add their concerns to the public debate we are having here within this chamber. They are concerned that:

"Credit unions and caisses populaires are not specifically exempt from Bill 48.

"Section 3 of the act states, 'This act does not apply to persons, entities or payday loans or classes of persons, entities or payday loans that are prescribed.'

"Currently, credit unions are exempt from the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, including the provisions of the regulations thereunder dealing with payday loans. Compliance with that statute is enforced by the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

"The credit union system is concerned about the possibility of having two different ministries regulating different but related aspects of the business."

"We are of the view that it would be more efficient from the government's and taxpayer's point of view to have DICO and/or FSCO carry out all regulatory functions with respect to the operations of credit unions, rather than to assign this small part of its business to a different ministry.

"If credit unions will not receive an absolute exemption from the operation of the bill, then we are of the view that it would be preferable to add parallel provisions dealing with potential 'payday lending' by credit unions to the anticipated draft general regulations under the Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act (which haven't been released yet—but the new act passed in the 2007 budget bill), and"—

Mr. Jeff Leal: That's a good point.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you. Did I just hear you say that I had a good point? Keep saying it.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I think it's working. They're listening.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's working on them. I'm converting you—"amend the bill to deem compliance by

credit unions with their own legislative and regulatory requirements with respect to payday lending to be in compliance with the provisions of the bill."

The Credit Union Central of Ontario also feels that "the government, taxpayers and the credit union system are better off exempting credit unions from Bill 48, and provide parallel provisions to regulate potential payday lending by credit unions under our own regulatory regime."

I'm going to conclude now. I think I have made the point of my concerns in the bill that what we need to do is make sure that people have choice, that we have a regulated choice for them so that they're not going into the backwoods, loan-shark dealers, that they're going to reputable companies that are willing and able to play by the rules with a licensing regime and a regulatory framework that is going to protect people. Quite honestly, when you hear that people are actually using the reputable guys, like the Money Mart and the Cash Store, whatever they're called, they're using them because they're convenient—a lot of people are. So the people who are most vulnerable are using the fly-by-nighters, and we've got to get them away from the fly-by-nighters. That's what this bill does.

I've just left some ideas here for the government which I hope it will listen to. I'll be very pleased to be part of the very public scrutiny and debate and put forward my own resolutions and amendments to this bill.

As the Library of Parliament points out, "A regulatory framework that makes it unprofitable to stay in business—some payday loan customers may turn to less desirable, underground credit options, including organized crime and loansharking."

I have to ask members here: If we limit choice, is that what we want to see our constituents resort to? I'm thinking no; I don't agree with that at all. Surely, I would expect, there is not one member in this House who wants that either.

While the official opposition does have concerns with Bill 48, we strongly support the introduction of legislation that would protect Ontario's consumers from the extremely high costs of borrowing with respect to the payday loan industry. Bill 48, in our opinion, is a very important piece of legislation that has finally been brought forward in this House, and it is important for two main reasons. Not only is this a step forward for real consumer protection in Ontario, but it will also create a regulatory framework and ban—outright ban—controversial lending practices.

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This proposed legislation, if we get it right—and there are a few things we could do to get it right; there's always room for improvement—will protect the people who use this service while keeping the industry sustainable and viable, but also with the highest standards of ethics and best practices, and I think we've started it today. I look forward to the public debate and I look forward to clause by clause. I look forward to protecting Ontario's consumers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened with interest to the member from Nepean–Carleton. Again, I'm going to go into great detail, but I want to say one thing: Certainly she's right: It's not an anti-poverty bill. Second of all, we did consult. We consulted with an excellent consultant, Bob Whitelaw, who was the founding president and CEO of the Canadian Payday Loan Association. He seems to feel that the Canadian Payday Loan Association isn't necessary, that Alterna and other credit unions can fill the gap, can provide what's needed and can do it at 28% interest, even lower than what my bill and other jurisdictions call for.

There are other jurisdictions that meet my bill's requirements and the Quebec legislative requirements as well. For example, Denver capped interest rates at 36%. By the way, the Pentagon caps interest rates at 36% for its military personnel. It's interesting that the McGuinty Liberals are less progressive than the Pentagon. Also, New Hampshire has a 36% capped rate; New South Wales, 48%; Oregon, 36%; and Manitoba, Nova Scotia, BC and New Brunswick all have capped interest rates. All we are asking for in the bill that we put forward in the New Democratic Party, Bill 224, is a capped interest rate. The question is, why could this bill not have brought in a capped interest rate when so many other jurisdictions have done that already?

I also speak on the heels of an incredible study done by the United Way with some excellent researchers who point to a tenfold increase in so-called payday lending. We call them loansharking. I don't see the difference, and I'll go into that in a moment. Their increase is not in middle-class neighbourhoods, not in Rosedale; no, it's in the poorest neighbourhoods of our city.

I look forward to speaking more about this.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the comments made by the member for Nepean–Carleton, who wishes to maintain the industry's existence, and I acknowledge the member for Parkdale–High Park, who recommends that it be eliminated entirely.

Further to our debate, allow me to highlight the key differences between Ontario's approach and that of other provinces. We note that regulations have not yet been finalized in most jurisdictions, but a review of the proposed legislation suggests that there are differences between Ontario and the other provinces:

(1) Stronger enforcement tools, by including administrative penalties under an absolute liability requirement; that gives Ontario a greater ability to ensure lender compliance.

(2) Stronger consumer remedies: Ontario has established the principle in the legislation that borrowers do not have to pay any portion of the costs of borrowing in the case of a non-compliant loan.

(3) Consumer education: Ontario has chosen to empower consumers by establishing a credit/finance education fund through mandatory contributions from lenders.

(4) Maximum total costs of borrowing: In compliance with federal law, we propose that Ontario create that independent expert board for the exclusive purpose of recommending a limit to the cost of borrowing, a panel to be chosen in short order to deal holistically. Other jurisdictions are using existing public boards or are simply establishing the rate in regulation through an internal process.

What's important is that we do continue to serve the needs and provide choice for informed consumers, ensure economic stability and protect the most vulnerable. I think, on that, we all agree.

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to commend our member Lisa MacLeod from Nepean–Carleton for such a thorough review, looking at the federal implications that really cascaded this bill, with the changes back in 2007 defining, under the Criminal Code, certain things that require the province to set a regulatory structure in place, which I think is the appropriate thing to do.

To have Mr. Keyes here today was complementary to the process itself. I think, on all sides, it would be agreeable to say we are supportive. I want as well to compliment Mr. Sousa, from Mississauga South, for doing a great job in the absence of Mr. McMeekin, the minister. I wish him well.

This is not, by any stretch or any examination, a small bill. Like all Liberal bills, there is a lot of red tape in here. I'm just going to refer to a couple of things, without being critical. They tend to overdo things, as they would; they have lots of money to spend, usually.

If you look at page 39 of the bill, section 77, I believe there are a total of 37 sections that define and allow—if you look at the permission section, it says, "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations" with respect to a whole litany of things; it's huge. Not just setting up the registrar and all the oversight, and the review, investigation and inspection processes, but if you look at some of the sections, some of the powers need to be—for instance, section 5, dealing with the registrar, which is appropriate. He's going to be appointed; it'll probably be a political appointment.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: It says right in here, and I hope that person is qualified.

Section 6—licensing, the power of the licensing and the inspection process—is something. So keep an eye on the bill. It's a large bill. Don't be fooled by the agreement of the House.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I listened carefully to the comments of the member for Nepean–Carleton, and I thought it was a very thoughtful and positive address. She certainly has done her homework. She has reviewed Bill 48 and, I think, has provided some excellent commentary about where there may be some areas in the bill that need some amendment as it goes through various readings in this House and on to committee for an opportunity to look at it on a clause-by-clause basis.

There's no question in my mind today that when it comes to financial activities in our society and protection of the consumer, there is a need for legislation. This area of payday loans is a very important issue. I've had people come to my constituency office in Peterborough who felt that, indeed, they had been ripped off by these fly-by-night operators who seem to be attracted to this kind of activity—the opportunity to make a fast buck, to prey upon individuals who often find themselves in very difficult circumstances. They go to these payday loan people—these sharks, as I call them—and pay an exorbitant interest rate to cash their paycheques. This is an area into which I think Bill 48 will play a big role, bringing regulation and oversight.

The protection of consumers in Ontario is not a partisan issue. There are times when pieces of legislation come forward in this House and there's an opportunity where I think there can be a consensus of the three parties to come together through the committee process to make some amendments and really put forward a piece of legislation that benefits consumers in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member from Nepean–Carleton has up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Parkdale–High Park, whom I want to commend. We may not exactly agree on this, but she has done an awful lot of work and I congratulate her on that.

I want to congratulate the parliamentary assistant. You did an amazing job; it must not have been easy. You're a new member and you did this when the minister was not here, and I commend you for that.

Obviously, my very good colleague, my friend from Durham has been a constant source of support for me. To my colleague from Peterborough: I appreciate that, because quite honestly, this piece of legislation is important. It's long overdue. There have been calls from virtually all corners of this Legislature to enhance consumer protection for those consumers who are using payday loans.

But I must remind everyone that we don't need to protect us from ourselves. We have to protect ourselves. My concern is that we are trying to micromanage people's lives in the name of consumer protection. I think that consumer protection also comes with consumer choice.

1620

I think the real issue in terms of people's credit is fiscal literacy. During this entire debate, I'm not going to let up; I'm going to be talking about fiscal literacy and how I think this government could be doing a better job. We're early in this process, so I'm asking you now to be partners with me and the official opposition and especially our education critic as we move forward in trying to make sure that children in this province learn at an earlier age what their responsibilities are with their own credit and with their own money, because I think that's where it starts. It's not up to the government to tell people how to live their lives and to eliminate their choice. It's up to us to make our own choices and make them responsibly, with the best information that we have available. I would urge the government to consider that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for her contribution to the debate. Further debate? The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Applause.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, my lone fan. And I look forward—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Trinity–Spadina.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Trinity–Spadina. He wants to be acknowledged. Thank you.

To those at home, we have some time to walk through this issue. But first, before I begin, I do want to say something about the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

I want to say that when I was a newbie here, when I first came to this House, he came over—and I just want to say that we share something in common, Mr. McMeekin and I: we're both United Church ministers. I have to say that his ordination vows stood him in good stead. He came over to me—the only Liberal, the only member of the caucus ever to do so—and apologized for the smear campaign that happened during my by-election. He was the most gracious and wonderful person to me. I try to extend that to other new members, so I want to thank him. I also want to let him know, as I have done, that we in the New Democratic Party certainly do wish him the very best, wish him a speedy recovery, wish that he come back to this chamber. My prayers are with you, Ted, and I hope you're listening.

I'm glad you've done something. I'm glad you've taken some step, because certainly a step needed to be taken. And I have to say at the outset that we are going to vote in favour of this bill. But, you know—and here's the big "but"—it does not go far enough. In fact, it doesn't go anywhere much at all, and that's the problem. That is the problem.

Carol Goar said in a wonderful article not too long ago in the Star, "1,000% Interest 1,000% Wrong." I have heard my colleague from Nepean–Carleton and others speak about protecting those in the public from loan sharks, sending them instead to legitimate payday lenders. Well, I've got a dictionary and I suspect everybody watching at home has a dictionary. Look up "loan shark" and you will read next to "loan shark" this definition: "Those who charge excessive interest."

Now I turn to the federal government on this, in Bill C-26. They define excessive interest. Usurious interest used to be considered 60%. Now, considering that extremely expensive credit cards charge 28% to 30%, one would have to agree with the federal criminal designation of excessive interest at 60%. Surely anything in excess of 60% should be considered, by any definition, loan sharks, loansharking. But instead of, you know, Tony Soprano and the Bada Bing on the corners of our poorest neighbourhoods, we have instead this industry, if I can call it that—well, industry maybe—this business, unregulated financial business, on the corners of our poorest neighbourhoods. They don't exist in Rosedale. You don't see them in Forest Hill. You don't even see them near Riverside Drive in my own riding. Where do you find payday lenders? You find them in the poorest ridings, in the poorest places, and United Way has told us this. They've described a tenfold increase of loan sharks/payday lenders in the poorest neighbourhoods in the last 15 years, a huge explosion of unregulated loan sharks going by names that sound kind of nice, like they're your friends or something.

I remember very clearly a day when I was out campaigning in the last election. It was in a Toronto Community Housing building where hundreds of residents reside. Most of those residents collect their only income through the social service system; they're on ODSP or OW. A few of them work hard at minimum-wage jobs. They woke up one morning to a door hanger on every door in that building, a door hanger from one of the so-called reputable payday lenders/loan sharks. The door hanger said, "Free coffee and doughnuts," just before the cheques went out.

I have heard that the average user of payday lenders is a middle-class person making between $30,000 and $70,000 a year. I have to say, that may be true somewhere, but it's not true according to the studies I've read, according to the studies that have been done by people like Chris Robinson at York University, a financial professor there. It's certainly not true in my riding. I think that anybody who has an area of poverty in their ridings will know that payday lenders/loan sharks target the poorest people.

I saw a wonderful film which I highly recommend. It's an American film called Maxed Out. In that film, they don't target payday lenders, interestingly enough; they target those who try to foist credit cards, as the member from Nepean–Carleton said, on the sometimes financially illiterate, sometimes just desperate—students and the like. A professor was asked to look at their lending practices and comment on them. This professor looked at their lending practices and said, to a room full of some of the largest banks and lending institutions in the United States, "If you just did not offer credit cards to this lower strata of 15% of high-risk borrowers, you would save over 50% of your bad debt loss." A little hand went up. One of the CEOs in the back of the room had been listening intently, and he said, "And so would over 80% of our profit," because what they know, and what the payday lenders/loan sharks know, is that where they make the greatest profit is from those who do not pay the loan back. Just like the credit card companies make their greatest profits not from those who pay their credit cards off in total every month but those who roll over the loans, who turn $200 of a micro-loan into $5,000 of debt or more: That's where the profit is. There's no question of that.

If you compare the 1,000% interest—and we're not inventing 1,000% interest, by the way. Again, it has been attested to by a number of journals, a number of articles, a number of studies: anywhere from 300% to 400% to 1,000% interest. It's hidden because it's in the secret little fees, the extra fees that are tacked on if you're late

etc., but that's what it amounts to, and everybody knows it: 400% to 1,000%.

If you look at who gets charged that, you're not looking at upper-middle-class, middle-class, wealthy people in Rosedale or Forest Hill; no, you're looking at people who are desperate for money, who can't pay their rent, who can't feed their children, who go because everybody else has turned them down and this is their last resort.

I'm a big fan of The Sopranos. Loansharking used to be the purview of the mafia and organized crime. Now it's not just their purview; no, now it's on your street corner and my street corner. But hey, that was the same reason that people went to Tony: because they were desperate and because all of the established lenders had turned them down. You don't pay 400% to 1,000% interest if you don't have to. That's the simple truth.

1630

In my riding, we have payday lenders/loan sharks set up across from drop-in centres for those on ODSP and those who are homeless. We have them set up as close as possible to Toronto Community Housing developments. We have them set up where recent immigrants first come to Toronto, first move in, in the lower south end of Parkdale. That's where they set up. I have over 24 and counting in my riding alone. No question about it.

Now, to talk about Bill 48, and the problems. This is one of those classic Liberal bills. I spoke about two others this morning. I described them as, in Shakespeare's words, a lot of sound and fury signifying, in this case, not much.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair."

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Exactly, as my friend from Trinity–Spadina interjects.

Here we're consulting on the taxpayers' dime. There's no question about it. In fact, our friend Bob Whitelaw—remember, I mentioned his name. Certainly, he's been worth his weight in gold to us as we structured Bill 224 to put a hard cap of 35%, which is what we in the New Democratic Party think should go ahead, and also for the press conference. This is a man who brings a specialized knowledge. After all, as I said before, he was the founding president and CEO of the Canadian Payday Loan Association for two years, and also the former president and CEO of the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus. He says it's not a necessary industry. Mr. Whitelaw says that credit unions could provide this service charging no more than 28%, and they would still make a healthy profit. It stands to reason.

For those listening at home, when the payday lending/loan shark industry says to us they can't make a profit at less than 150% to 200% interest, one has to question who these people are. After all, credit card companies and banks seem to be doing all right these days. They're surviving; right? They're paying their bills, they're paying their rent, unlike the people who use the payday lending association.

It's interesting, and just an aside for the people at home—certainly Mr. Keyes has left the assembly; I hope he's watching on television—you couldn't have seen a more stark contrast in our visitors in the members' gallery today. On one side we had Mr. Keyes, very well dressed, I must say; a lovely suit, a lovely shirt and a lovely tie; a former Liberal revenue minister. One wonders why they're not moving too quickly on this issue, because they're consulting with the head of the payday loan association, who was a former Liberal revenue minister. Perhaps that's why they're not moving quickly to help the poorest people in this province.

So there he was sitting, looking very smug, I might say, listening to his industry spoken about in glowing terms. On the other side we had community activist James Wardlaw of ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. I'm sure James will not be insulted if I describe him wearing a shirt, a T-shirt, and a lovely lady sitting next to him wearing a T-shirt. Ordinary people have been working with ordinary people, working with the poorest of the poor in some of our poorest housing developments. ACORN is a phenomenal organization that has organized in a grassroots way, not only in Canada but right across North America.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And successfully.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Totally successfully, and which has been—and I should put this on the record—absolutely the real front runner on this issue, the one that has been there every step of the way. In fact, I took my lead from them. So we're delighted to have them.

Again, the stark contrast: the wealthy, the not so wealthy; those who are well-heeled and well-connected with the cabinet and the Premier, those not so well-heeled, not so well-connected with the Premier and his cabinet. And what is the result of that? The result of that is a bill that doesn't do much. Trust me, the only reason this bill exists is because of the James Wardlaws of the world and the incredible work that's been done, and—I have to give credit where credit is due—the Toronto Star, which came out in its editorial and supported my bill for a 35% cap on interest, which talked about others moving forward in this way.

Let's talk about those other jurisdictions. It's been said here in this chamber that we can't exist, first of all, without microloans, and I would say that there is some point there. Although I modelled my legislation on the Quebec legislation, with a 35% cap, I admit that we do not want to drive people underground. We do not want to drive people to pawnshops. We do not want to drive people to Tony Soprano, because although the interest rate might be better with Tony than it is with the payday lenders, we know there are some other consequences of dealing with organized crime that perhaps you don't have to face when dealing with the businesses called payday lenders. So we don't want that to happen. We want banks and credit unions to be able to offer microloans, and we have been fighting for this for a long time. There is a necessity for microlending in this country and in this province, no doubt. The only question up for discussion

here is, is it necessary to charge 300% to 1,000% interest to do it? If an industry says they can't make money without charging 300% to 1,000% interest, one has to ask about the very nature of the industry.

The state of New Hampshire wrote this preamble to their law. Again, the Americans seem to like 36%. Quite frankly, we, in the New Democratic Party, could live with 36%.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's better than 1,000%.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Big time. This is the preamble to their bill:

"Findings and Intent. The general court finds that the rates of interest charged by many title loan lenders and payday lenders are unreasonable and predatory. Statistics available to the general court demonstrate some title loan lenders charge annual percentage rates of interest of up to 350% and payday lenders are charging up to 1,000%," similar to here. "The general court recognizes that due to the extremely short term of title loans and payday loans, documentation fees of even a nominal amount will cause such loans to have a high rate because the fees are included in the annual percentage rate calculation. However, the rates currently charged are unfair and improper. Therefore, to continue to make these credit products available to individuals who are otherwise unable to obtain credit, rates permitted ... must be capped ... ."

That's New Hampshire, that radical left-wing state.

Then, there's Oregon—hey, 36%.

I particularly like the example of the Pentagon. The McGuinty Liberals are less progressive than the Pentagon, which has offered a 36% cap to military personnel because they care about soldiers who have served their country and they care that they were being used and abused by the payday lending business. These are men and women who came back and were trying to establish themselves, who didn't have regular employment, who needed microloans and who were targets of the payday lending industry in the States.

So this is across the United States. If they can do it, if the Pentagon can do it, why cannot the McGuinty Liberals? It boggles the mind.

There's another dark side to the fact that we are so behind the curve on this, compared to other jurisdictions—of course, Quebec, as I've cited, with 35%; the American jurisdictions; now we've got Manitoba and others who are leading the way; and of course, as always, Ontario is following. The payday lending industry in the States is eyeing Canada. Why? Because we are a happy hunting ground. We're looking at, in fact, an explosive growth, according to Joanna Smith, of American loan firms moving across the border because we don't have regulations here.

"American firms are considering expansion into Canada as payday lending emerges slowly...."

1640

We're looking at "Advance America, Cash Advance Centers, a large payday-lending firm based in" South Carolina, which "opened 10 stores in Canada under the name National Cash Advance."

It's really interesting: They say down in the States that they see Canada as providing the "new growth opportunities" for stores that the American legislation has shut out.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Can you believe it?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Of course. If you have states that are willing to take their citizens' needs and rights and their own responsibilities as legislators to heart and to actually move to address what really is legalized—well, "legalized" is a strong word—unregulated loansharking, and we don't, those businesses that are being driven out of Quebec, being driven out of Oregon, being driven out of New Hampshire, being driven out of one jurisdiction after another in the States will come here. So instead of having 1,300-and-some payday lenders across Canada, and 700 and growing in Ontario alone, we could see 3,000 while we consult, while we look at what we might be doing to actually bring in the necessary hard cap.

They're not resting; they're not consulting; they're expanding. They're not waiting for more experts to tell them what to do. They're smart business people. They see an opportunity and they're going for it. Their sights are firmly north, firmly towards Canada. So if you think it's scary now in your ridings where poverty exists, in terms of the numbers of payday lenders, let me tell you that the invasion has just begun.

Just to backtrack: This whole situation came about because the federal government had a criminal rate of 60%. Over 60% was considered criminal. It was considered loansharking; it was considered usury.

I hope that Ted is also listening because I'm going to appeal to Ted, who I'm sure is doing what he can. He has a cabinet to answer to. He has a Premier to answer to—his biblical nature. Because anybody of faith will know that all you have to do is look to all the great works of faith and you will find in those great works absolute statements about what usury and loansharking is. From the Koran, from the writings of Buddha, from the Torah, from the Christian Bible: All of these writings write about how criminal loansharking and usury is. We had a definition for what that meant in Canada at one time: anybody charging more than 60%. But the federal government downloaded to the provinces the responsibility of regulating that. So that's why we're having this discussion. We have been waiting and waiting for this government to regulate it, to pick up the mantle and to do something.

As I said, I'm pleased that we have an inch. I'm pleased that something has finally been brought forward. I'm also pleased that there will be consultation, in the sense that I hope that this government listens to the voices. I hope they listen to the voices, because some of the voices are pretty sad.

There was a story in my riding. I'll just bring it forward and I'll change her name. The press is always asking me for stories about people who have been used by payday lenders. There are hundreds of them, but it's one of those topics—and this is where I really suggest that people watch the Maxed Out film—that people feel

such a great degree of shame about. People don't want to come forward and talk about how they're in debt for $5,000 for a $200 loan. They don't want to share the fact that they've gone bankrupt several times and that they've been evicted yet again. This is difficult for people; that's why they don't come forward. That's why we as legislators, in a very real ethical sense, have to do the speaking for them. That's why we have to bring their stories forward. That's why we have to bring what they know to be true, to be true here for all of Ontario, to this Legislature and do something about it.

We were not elected to consult; we were elected to lead. We were elected to act. We were elected to move where the rights of individuals, the rights of communities, are being shaken to the core.

"Hartley, a courier who earns about $600 a week, said he's recently declared bankruptcy—fallout from his divorce.... He has a bank account, but no line of credit.

"Two weeks ago, he fell behind on some bills and had to go for an advance at a payday loan company....

"'You can only get half of what your paycheque is,' he said."

The cost of $300 for two weeks was $60. I leave it to those with a head for math to figure out what that interest is on an annualized basis.

Here are the families that use payday lenders, according to those who have done the studies. Again, this is from the CBC. A study released Friday from United Way showed that "families with $500 or less in the bank were 2.6 times more likely to have used payday loans than those with between $2,000 and $8,000." It doesn't sound too middle class to me.

"Families who had been refused a credit card were more than three times as likely to have had a payday loan than those who had been granted a card, the report said."

These are who are using payday lenders or loan sharks.

One woman's $500 loan took five years to retire. In the end, the woman paid an additional $9,500 in interest and other fees. This is what we're talking about.

If there's a different definition of loan shark, if there's a more generous one that I'm not aware of, that I'm not seeing in my dictionaries when I look up the term, if there's a more generous definition of usury than I see when I look to both the Biblical text, the Greeks before them and the dictionaries, I would love to hear that from the opposition members. I would love to hear what they think a loan shark is that we're saving people from to send them to payday lenders instead, because I warrant that what you'll find is exactly where they're going, which is what we call payday lenders.

Let's go to ACORN, because they produced a really definitive work on this. Again, I thank those who've done the work. I know that Chris Robinson, the York professor, was very engaged in this work. Here's something that I would suggest the people at home really take to heart. It's interesting that we in the NDP are the only party—I have to say that—standing up for the folk who produced this report. One might ask: Why? Why are we the only party that is not in favour of payday lenders, who are in favour of people getting reasonable interest? By that, we mean 35% or less—nothing too outrageous—which is more than most credit companies charge. Why are we the only party that is standing up for those people?

I suggest that the answer to that question comes from where the other parties get their funding. If you were to go to a fundraiser of our colleagues the Progressive Conservatives and Liberals, who might you find there? It's interesting how things work in politics. You trace issues back to money always. "He who pays the piper calls the tune": We've heard of that. Interestingly enough, both parties have friends in banks, and interestingly enough, banks are invested in payday lending.

Toronto Dominion is more heavily invested in the predatory economy, owning over a million shares in payday lenders worth more than $50 million, including 250,000 shares in Money Mart, the largest payday lender and cheque casher in the country. I found this shocking, I have to say. Anybody who is invested in the stock market should really check their investment portfolio right about now and see if they too are invested in payday lender/loasharking businesses.

1650

Let's see: Who else? Interestingly, Ernst and Young—I'm going to walk through the ACORN study, because it's excellent. In 2004, Ernst and Young prepared a study for the Canadian Payday Loan Association that found that each first-time customer would end up taking out an average of 15 rollover or rewrite loans. One thing that's clear is that payday loan customers don't just walk away from their loans; they can't. Ernst and Young—there's a study. We heard that the average customer is well-heeled, has other options. Not so much, I don't think, unless you want to take it up with Ernst and Young.

Going through here, most customers do not know about or did not qualify for conventional overdraft protection, which generally has about an 18% or 20% rate—significantly less expensive, of course, than payday loans. Interesting. So there you go. That's interesting. The Royal Bank of Canada and affiliates—and I was shocked to hear this because I'm a Royal Bank customer. I might think twice, as might others, to look at their holdings again and who they do their business with. The Royal Bank of Canada and their affiliates own a huge number of shares in Advance America, CompuCredit, Dollar Financial, EZCORP, First Cash Financial, World Acceptance Corp: again, predatory loan-shark payday lenders. This is shocking. I know Scotiabank also is involved in that.

Interestingly, the issue was brought to my attention by a person in my constituency office—and I should mention and give him credit too: Gregor Campbell—when he discovered that his own parents, unbeknownst to them, were invested in payday lenders through their stock portfolios. So, again, look at your stock portfolios, look at your banks, see where they're invested.

ACORN concludes with five very significant and, I think, simple recommendations:

"(1) Banks should divest their stocks from all institutions that are part of the predatory economy, such as subprime mortgage and payday lenders."

You thought subprime was just an American problem? It's not. It's here.

"(2) Banks should seek ways to improve their current services and products to better meet the needs of consumers who use payday lenders."

On that note, it's interesting. I was part of a wonderful pilot project in Parkdale, called the Parkdale Banking Project, in which we sat down with the banks and we asked them, "Why are you pulling out of poor neighbourhoods? Why can't people who primarily get their income through minimum-wage ODSP or OW have access to the banks the way they do in the wealthier neighbourhoods?" Actually, to give the Royal Bank its due, they did open a Cash 'N' Save on Queen Street in Parkdale as a result of that Parkdale Banking Project. No microloans yet, but one of the things—and it was significant—is that they loosened up the requirement around identification. Those who are homeless, those who are on ODSP, those who have any kind of challenge, whether it be physical or mental, sometimes have problems keeping enough identification and keeping their bank accounts straight. This bank offered to work with them. We wish all banks would do that, and make microloans. But, as you heard, we certainly have credit unions that are willing to do that—and at 28%.

The next point, and this ties in to ACORN's demand:

"(3) Canada's credit unions should implement alternative payday loan programs, such as those used by some U.S. credit unions."

Again, I circle back to my main point, which is that nobody is saying there is not a market, or should not be a market, for microloans, and I'll have something to say in a moment about the poverty that, of course, breeds that market. But the need is there. We do need microloans. What we don't need is 300% to 1,000% interest for those microloans. Certainly, what we do need is a reasonable interest rate, which I think anybody at home, anybody who thinks about it for more than a minute, would agree is 35% or less.

"(4) Banks should learn from predatory lending problems in the U.S. and work to better serve those customers who are targeted for subprime mortgages."

We'd better hope that we don't have the continuing downturn in the economy in Ontario; otherwise, we are a market also for the kind of insanity that has gripped our neighbours to the south. Anyone who's travelled to the States can attest to the fact—I came back from Florida with my daughter and saw dozens of houses owned by the bank, dozens of houses that had been repossessed. Why? Again, you're looking at people in great need of money who aren't getting it—not enough to live on. That's who this predatory industry—payday lenders/loan sharks—preys upon.

"(5) Banks that have a subprime lending division should implement policies so they are not just referring customers down to the subprime division from the bank, but the subprime division refers customers with good credit up to the bank." Thanks to James Wardlaw, who's here, and thanks to ACORN for the phenomenal work and the grassroots organizing they've done around this critical issue.

At the end of the day, the people who are preyed upon, who go to loan sharks and payday lenders, the people who are charged the 800% to 1,000% interest, are not the people from Rosedale or from Forest Hill, and they're not from Riverside Drive; they're the people who are desperate for funds.

I checked. You can get a loan for 4.75% these days if you have a good credit rating, if you have money. In a kind of strange sense, you can get an inexpensive loan if you don't need it. If you don't need it, you can get as much money as you want and be charged as little money as can be charged for it. If you desperately need the money—if you can't pay your rent, if you can't feed your children, if you're about to get evicted, if you can't make it because your $8.75 an hour you make when you work 40 hours a week just doesn't pay for all of those things in any city in Ontario—then you get charged between 300% and 1,000% interest.

One has to wonder at the logic and the justice of this; one has to wonder at who this logic and justice serves. It certainly doesn't serve the folks who are making $8.75, who are making the ODSP rates, who are on OW; it doesn't serve them. It doesn't serve those who use the payday lenders: Even if they're making $30,000 to $70,000 for a family, that's not a lot in the city of Toronto. People are finding that that's not a lot. It's true: We are increasingly destroying the middle class in this province; we are increasingly seeing a gap grow between those who are extremely wealthy, who don't need the loans but who can get the loans at a very cheap rate, and those who are very poor, who really need the loans but have to pay usurious rates to get them.

That's the background behind this discussion: The ugly background that nobody has addressed here in this House this afternoon is poverty—the poverty of the province of Ontario, where one in eight children are poor, where one million people on minimum wage make the poverty line or less and work 40 hours a week. That's the backdrop to this: The backdrop to this discussion is the 200,000-and-growing good manufacturing jobs that have been lost and the call centre jobs that have replaced them; the backdrop to this conversation is the utter misery of those families who just try to get by and can't. They cannot get by on what they earn. That is what the LICO, the poverty line cut-off, means.

But it's interesting that the government's approach to payday lending is the same approach they have taken to the issue of poverty in general. The approach they have taken to the issue of poverty in general is to strike a committee to study the problem. A housing activist said to me the other day, "What those who are in need of housing need"—the 170,000 on the housing waiting lists in Ontario—"is not to be addressed but to have an address. That's what they need." But this government

isn't interested in that; they're interested in addressing them, not giving them an address, so they're consulting with them.

1700

We see in the budget that came forward not one line item for new affordable housing. There's $100 million that fixes up, patches up, existing affordable housing across the province when Save Our Structures has asked for $300 million for the city of Toronto alone, and that's just to patch up the housing we already have. Again, there are 170,000 households—not individuals—waiting on the list for affordable housing in the province of Ontario. That's the backdrop. What happens in such a scenario?

My father was a product of the dirty thirties, as he used to call it. When I was a little girl, he used to talk about growing up in the city of Toronto, in downtown Toronto. He used to talk about the days when they had soup kitchens and lineups for food. He remembers when there used to be people sleeping on grates in the city. I remember as a little girl saying, "No, not in Toronto the Good, not in the city of Toronto. People sleeping on the street? People lining up for food?" We all know in this House, we know at home, that that's our reality now. That's where we are right now. That's what we live with in the city of Toronto and across Ontario, just like then.

Back in the dirty thirties, as he called it, unregulated predatory lending became a real problem. We've all seen the movies that came out of the 1920s and 1930s, the gangster films. Predatory lending was the criminal response to the need for money by people who were starving, in some instances, going to bed hungry and certainly going without work. That was the response back then, and guess what? That's the response now.

There's a good reason why the payday lending/loansharking business is exploding across Ontario. It's exploding across Canada, where it's not regulated. The only place with a hard cap right now is Quebec, where there is not one payday lender. It's exploding where it can because the need is there, because people are going to bed hungry, they can't pay their rent, they don't have affordable housing and their children are poor despite the fact that they're working as hard as they can. That's the backdrop for all of this.

So what's the response—just to go back—of Bill 48? Again, just like the response to poverty itself, we have a response that says, "More consulting is necessary." It would be interesting to know how many studies have been done on poverty. I think the studies that have been done on the payday lending industry could probably compete with the studies done on poverty. We might be able to build houses out of them. That might be something useful from all the studies done, because I'm sure the studies done on defining poverty and what poverty means would pile from here to the top of this legislative ceiling—lots of studies; no action.

What does Bill 48 fail to do? It fails to put a hard cap on the criminal fees and interest rates charged by lenders. It legislates that payday loan agreements disclose to borrowers the annual percentage rates—interest and fees. If you can't pay your rent and you can't feed your children, do you think that informing somebody who walks into a payday lender about how much they're actually going to pay is going to make a difference? I don't think it will. I think if you're desperate for that money, if you need that money or you face eviction, you just say, "Whatever," and you sign. It's not a question of posting the fees. It doesn't matter. The fees could be 2,000%. People who are desperate for the money, if that's the only place they can get the money, they'll get the money. They'll sign, because what other choice do they have?

It promises to increase the transparency of the industry by requiring an annual report to the minister on the use and cost of payday loans, complaints, default information and recommendations. Come on—like that's going to help. A usurious industry, an industry that really is a loansharking industry by any definition, reporting on what they're doing to a government bureaucrat is going help the person who's desperate and needs the loan. On what basis is that going to help anything?

Another thing it doesn't regulate is it allows interest to be charged on borrowers in default. Surely the very least you could do is to address that issue. One of the interesting differences between Bill 48 and Bill 224, which is the bill that we brought in to actually set a hard cap of 35%, is the maximum fine. Not only does Bill 48 not set a hard cap, but the penalties—and remember, we're talking about an industry that one can only imagine the profits that are being made. It would be very interesting to know exactly what profits are being made. One might suspect that when you're charging 300% to 1,000% interest, your return on investment, considering it's a storefront and people are probably being paid minimum wage behind the counter, is probably pretty great. It's probably pretty substantial, your return on investment there. The maximum fine charged to a licensee is $10,000. We proposed a maximum fine of $50,000 for individuals and $250,000 for corporations.

Again, we see a typical McGuinty Liberal approach to a problem, any problem: Consult, don't act, and put no teeth in the legislation, so that even if it is passed, quite frankly, it's better as a business person, I would imagine, in the payday lending/loansharking business, to simply barrel ahead and pay the fine. Certainly we've seen other industries conduct business that way, because it just simply makes sense.

I have, believe me, nothing against small business. In fact, I had a small business, and I'm the small business critic. I want to see small business profit and prosper in the area of Ontario. These are not small businesses; these are some of the largest corporate-sponsored businesses we know. That's who's setting up in your neighbourhood and mine on the corners. They are the ones to be most frightened of.

I can tell you that in my riding, the small business retailers, the others who are sitting next door to them, don't like them. They don't want them there. They know that when you see the payday lender open up next door, it

means the whole tenor of the neighbourhood is collapsing. It means that people will be less likely to walk into their store because the payday lender is next door. It is a sure signal to the community, to the small business owners, that this neighbourhood is not so good. It's not looking so good.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Time to move, eh?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Time to move. Quite frankly, that's not what small business wants. I don't see payday lenders showing up for BIA meetings in my riding. I don't know about you; I never see them at the table. I don't see them there consulting with other small business owners. I don't see them contributing to the community. I don't see them putting money into the community. I certainly see the money going out of the community, but I don't see them at the table when discussions are made around, for example, beautifying streetscapes or beautifying even the facades of their own businesses. They're not in those discussions, and they're not there for a reason. They know better than anyone who they are and what they're about. They know better than anyone what the true nature of their business is. We all know what the true nature of their business is.

The only question before us—because as I said, there's no question that we will support this because at least it's an inch. We'll support this because at least we're moving forward.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: What else are you going to do?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: What else can we do? It's a majority government. They get to do what they want, when they want. We'll support any little crumb. I used the Oliver Twist metaphor at one point. We're like Oliver: "Please, sir, just a little more." Here we are again at the table: "Please, sir, just a little more." Anything, any crumb to help those who are in need food, is better than no crumbs at all.

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But I have to say this: When this consultation happens, I would love to see—I'll make some recommendations to you as to whom I'd like to see on there. I would like to see James Wardlaw there; I'd like to see somebody from ACORN. They're the ones who brought this forward.

Perhaps Bob Whitelaw; I can think of no more proficient expert in the field than somebody who was actually the founding president and CEO of the Canadian Payday Loan Association and is now working for the credit union industry. He should be on it for sure, because he's looked at both sides now. I think there's a song about that: "Both Sides, Now." He's looked at both sides now.

He's been working in the payday lending industry and he's now working for the credit union industry. So when he appeared on our panel, when I tabled my Bill 224, asking for a hard cap of 35%, he was a wonderful expert witness to have because he knew what every jurisdiction had done. He knew the profit margins. He knew and consults with the credit union industry because he knows that you can make money at 28%, he says. You could make money at 35%. It's staggering.

I have to say that another group that's using payday lenders/loan sharks that hasn't been touched on is seniors. Seniors are some of the major users of payday lenders/loan sharks. They are, and they're on fixed incomes. Again, they don't read the small print. They're just desperate. They just need to get by, month to month.

He knows that you can make money charging what anybody would see as a generous rate of interest, and you can still make money. I have yet to hear anyone in the payday lending industry describe to anyone why you can't. If a credit union can make money at 28%, if a credit card company can make lots of money at 28% or 29%, why can't the payday lenders/loan sharks make money at 28% or 29%? Why? One has to ask, why?

It's interesting, in our riding, and I cite Peggy Nash for this: She's done a wonderful little project which is just to inform seniors and others that you can phone up your credit card company and just with negotiation—just negotiation—get a lower rate of interest. People don't know that. Hey, now you do.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: If you're a good customer.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: If you're a good customer, and you're paying 28% or 29%, phone them up—there's lots of competition in the field—and say, "You know, Citi Card, around the corner, is offering 9%. Will you match it or come halfway?" Almost invariably, they do. So you can negotiate with some of the biggest credit card players in the industry.

It's funny, you can't negotiate with payday lenders, sort of like Tony Soprano in that way. You can't negotiate with them. You can't phone up your payday lender and say, "You know, 800% to 1,000% interest? I have difficulty paying it. Could we maybe get 350% interest instead?"

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "Okay, maybe we'll negotiate that."

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You can't. Again, the true nature of this particular beast is shown, I think, in that very example alone. Just like Tony Soprano, you can't negotiate with payday lender/loan sharks. You just can't.

This is, finally, the situation we face. We face a lack of regulation still. Even if Bill 48 were to pass tomorrow, we would still have no hard cap on interest rates, which would mean you're still going to be paying over 300% in interest when you go to a payday lender, despite the fact that the downloading of this responsibility for regulation happened years ago, and that other jurisdictions, other provinces, have acted—and acted decisively, I might add, as in the question of Quebec, but certainly also in the question of Manitoba. One might ask, since Manitoba has already done the groundwork, why can't this government just look to Manitoba? Or, better, why not wait and bring in a bill that actually has a hard cap? Why waste taxpayers' money anymore? Again, that's what we're doing. Remember, we will be paying between $1 million and $2 million to consult on this issue. I bet the members of ACORN would like to share that $2 million across the

board. If you just went to the members of ACORN and said, "Here's two hundred and fifty bucks each," I think they'd be very happy with that. They'd tell you everything you need to hear about payday lending. Instead, no, we'll be paying for consulting, we'll be paying for legislative time. It amounts, by the way—because there are about 700 payday lenders in Ontario—to just over $2,000 per payday lender to study payday lending. Studies that have already been concluded in other jurisdictions, information that's easy to access—just go on the Internet. It's a stalling technique, and we get that.

I go back to that very pithy, I thought, example of the difference, just standing here in this assembly—looking at the one person who showed up to attest to this debate wearing a very nice suit, and the other who wears a work shirt. The one who has a very well-paid job, I'm sure, as the head of the Canadian payday lending association and probably a very well-paid job before that, as a Liberal revenue minister—contrast that with a grassroots campaigner, organizer and family person who's simply trying to help his neighbours out, who's simply trying to help all those who are being preyed upon by this industry.

Trust me, inaction, as I've said, is expensive. It's also expensive in two other ways. Number one, the huge influx from the United States of payday lenders, of loan sharks—I picture them amassing on the borders, as we speak, because as they regulate down there, with their 36% caps, they will come here to charge their 300% to 1,000% interest. Certainly, that will happen. But most importantly, what will happen from inaction, from not setting a hard cap, is that hour by hour, as we speak, as we sit, as we write, as we listen, as we legislate, people are walking in the doors of payday lenders and loan sharks right now; people who can't pay their rent, people whose children will go hungry if they don't get that microloan, people who will be evicted if they don't get that microloan, people who can't quite make it to the next pension cheque because they don't get that microloan. And once they get their hands on them, just like Mr. Soprano, they're not going to let go. While this government—there was an Emperor Nero, wasn't there?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My Italian colleague here remembers an emperor who fiddled while Rome burned. Bill 48, despite, I know, Mr. McMeekin's best intentions, is a form of fiddling.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's not about him. It's the Liberal Party, really.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It is. We need to lay that responsibility where it should be laid: not at Ted's feet, but at the cabinet and the Premier's feet, because we know where the decisions come from in this place. They don't come from this side of the House. They don't even come from that side of the House. They don't come from the backbenchers, many of whom, I know, have payday lenders in their ridings and wish they didn't. It comes from the Premier's office. That's where the buck finally stops; in this case, a buck that will rapidly become $300 to $1,000 in the hands of a payday lender.

I can't say it's been a delight to talk about Bill 48. I wish we were talking about a hard cap. I wish that we could walk from this place this day and assure all those people who are walking in and out of payday lenders, as we speak, that they're not going to be charged usurious loansharking rates, but that they're going to be charged something within the realm of reason. I wish we could assure people of that. We can't. We can't. We do what we can. We do what we can, so we'll work with this administration. We will work with this bill. We will try to give this bill the teeth it needs. We will try to fight for a cap of certainly no more than 36%, which seems to be the American answer to this problem—certainly no more than that; certainly, and hopefully, somewhat less than that.

More importantly, we in the New Democratic Party will work for the day when we don't need these lending institutions at all, because we here, who are not financed by banks and insurance companies, know who we speak for, and that is all of those who suffer, the ones who lost their jobs—the 200,000—those one in eight children who live in poverty. Those are the people whom we are fighting for. Those are the people whom we're standing here speaking about. Those are the people, finally, who need an answer, and they need action, not more talk.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Reza Moridi: I rise in this House today to speak about Bill 48, Payday Loans Act, 2008. Before commenting on this act, I would like to commend my colleague the member from Mississauga South and the parliamentary assistant for bringing this bill to this Legislature. I also wish to commend the minister for his initiative in bringing up this legislation—

Applause.

Mr. Reza Moridi: —and I wish the minister well.

The spirit of this bill is along the lines of the government's policy of reducing poverty. We know that people who use the services belong to the working class. They are poor people. They are not rich people. They are people who are on social assistance. They are working-class people. These payday lenders charge significantly high rates. Some of these people are back-to-back borrowing money from these lenders. Once they enter into the circle, it's very, very tough for them to get out of this circle. They enter into the circle and they remain in that circle for years and years to come.

I am pleased to hear that the NDP is supporting this bill, but I have a question. In the past, 14 years ago or 16 years ago when the NDP was in power, why didn't they bring in this bill? They had the time and they had the opportunity to bring in this bill, and even to ban payday lenders in this province, which they didn't at the time. But that's the past.

The spirit of this bill, when you look at it, is that we want to bring some discipline to this business, to this industry. Currently, there is no discipline. Currently, they can charge whatever rates they want to the borrowers.

The spirit of this bill is to help the working-class people of Ontario, to help the borrowers, to help the people who are on social assistance. When you look at the elements of this bill, you will see—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you to the honourable member. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to respond to the member for Parkdale–High Park with respect to her comments on Bill 48. I was interested to hear the response of the Liberal member from Richmond Hill, who seemed to suggest that the member for Parkdale–High Park should be responsible for the lack of action by the Bob Rae government between 1990 and 1995. It's ironic. I don't think I would blame the member for Parkdale–High Park for the inaction of the Bob Rae government from those years. Certainly, she wasn't here during those years, and it would perhaps be a bit unfair to blame her for the lack of action in that regard.

Certainly, in my riding, these payday lenders have proliferated in recent years. I've been quite concerned about it for some time. I think all of us in this House would agree that usurious interest rates should be prohibited. I believe, in many cases, people are borrowing money just to make ends meet until they get their paycheque, and in some cases, they have good reason to be very concerned about the interest rates they are paying. I think we should all be quite concerned, from a public policy perspective, as to whether or not the government must take action in this regard.

The Minister of Government and Consumer Services, Ted McMeekin, has brought forward this bill, and it's appropriate that he do so. But I also believe that there should be extensive public discussion on this issue, and I hope this bill will go to committee for public hearings. More work needs to be done. Certainly our caucus is prepared to roll up our sleeves and work with the government to try and get this bill right, to ensure that the public interest is protected.

I know the Minister of Government and Consumer Services quite well and I consider him a friend. I expect he's watching this debate and I want to wish him all the very best for a very speedy recovery, as he continues to get better, so that he can return to this House.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to congratulate my friend from Parkdale–High Park for being unflagging in her advocacy and indefatigable in her defence of the poor and the vulnerable. She did this for a whole hour. It was an admirable kind of presentation of views that some people listened to and some people didn't.

Imagine having to defend why the interest rate that is charged to poor people shouldn't be more than 35% or 36%. I find paying more than 6% criminal, and here we are, trying to persuade the Liberals that it would be nice to put a cap of 35%, certainly no more than 36%, on interest rates, as if this was a big, big deal. It is a big deal for poor people. It's a big deal for middle-class people and it certainly is a big deal for wealthy people, who would never pay those kinds of rates, who would be here demonstrating at Queen's Park should they be charged those kinds of rates. They would be rioting here and in Ottawa should they be charged those rates by banks or anyone else. Here we are, talking about the Liberals putting a cap—

Interjection: We're going to do better.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: This is not an attack on my friend for Mississauga South. He's just a PA; he's just ushering the bill. It's not an attack on Minister McMeekin. He's a nice guy. That's not the problem. It's a Liberal problemo. It's the way Liberals do things: announce and defer, announce, reannounce and post-announce. That's what they do. Every little package of things becomes a remarkable achievement by Liberals.

All we're trying to do is persuade the Liberals that putting a cap of 35% is a reasonable thing. How can anybody think otherwise? Why wouldn't the member from Mississauga South defend that and say, "Yes, we're going to go with a cap"? That's what I expect the Liberals to do.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'd like to thank my colleague from Richmond Hill, as well as the input from the members for Wellington–Halton Hills and Trinity–Spadina. I appreciate the comments of the member for Parkdale–High Park. I respect her passion on this critical issue. I am among those in the gallery who share a common concern to protect the consumer. I appreciate that the member acknowledges that she will be supporting the bill.

We spoke about the studies and the makeup. The studies indicate that payday loan users are younger than the general population and have an average income of $35,000 to $40,000. Environics and Ipsos Reid studies of the Canadian payday industry indicate that the borrowers' household incomes are lower than the general population, 49% of which have incomes lower than $35,000. They're more likely to have dependent children—47% of them—and are less likely to understand the true costs of their loans: 37% believe that the cost is the same as or lower than credit-card interest. Significantly, there are studies commissioned by the industry that also reveal that approximately 25% of their clientele have household incomes that are near or below Stats Canada's low-income cut-off measure.

My respected colleague also spoke about the banks and credit unions, noting that they do not provide payday loans. Banks, trust companies and most credit unions have exited the small, short-term loans market. Most of their customers have other vehicles at their disposal to provide funding for the brief periods when they run short of money or experience an emergency. Examples include credit card cash advances, overdraft protection and lines of credit.

These financial institutions claim that they are unable to provide a payday-loan-type product profitably within the 60% rate permitted under the Criminal Code. Additionally, banks and trust companies are excluded from the amendment to the Criminal Code in federal Bill C-26, which creates conditions exempting payday lenders

from criminal interest provisions. Credit unions and savings unions have considered offering a payday-loan-type product as part of a full suite of their credit products for their customers. However, there's been no action to date.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Parkdale–High Park has up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First, to the comment about the former administration of Bob Rae, I quote the incomparable words of the member from Welland when he said, "We hope that Bob Rae does for the federal Liberals what he did for the Ontario NDP." So, carry that with you as you go home.

Second of all, there are a few facts to be corrected. Payday lending didn't start as an industry until around 1993 or 1995. It's hard to go back that far, but it really exploded on the scene in the mid-90s. The United Way has charted the course of payday lending as an industry and its explosion in that period of time. It wasn't around even in Bob Rae's time.

I want to say again to Ted McMeekin: Thank you for doing something; thank you for taking a step. I hope you get back soon. Our prayers are with you. Thank you for being a friend. Thank you for being a stand-up guy. This isn't your fault.

Thank you to the member from Mississauga South. Thank you for doing what you need to do as a backbench Liberal. It isn't your fault either.

Thank you, member from Trinity–Spadina. It certainly isn't your fault. You're speaking with passion on behalf of the poor, speaking with passion on behalf of what makes sense.

We are talking about the McGuinty Liberal government, which is showing itself to be less progressive than the Pentagon, which wants 36% for military personnel. Less progressive than the Pentagon: Carry that with you.

I want to thank ACORN for being here. I want to thank them for all the work that they've done.

I also want to thank the United Way for their landmark study, from which I drew in my hour-long presentation, and for showing that this is a significant part of the problem for the poor in poor neighbourhoods.

So, thank you to all. We in the New Democratic Party will continue to work. We'll work with what we can, but we wish we finally had a cap of 35% and had passed Bill 224.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I appreciate this opportunity to have the chance to speak about the act that is going to regulate payday loans.

First of all, I really want to thank my colleague from Mississauga South. He has done a wonderful job today and is a great addition to our caucus. We are so proud to have him in our caucus.

I also want to thank the minister—I'm sure he's watching somewhere—for moving so quickly on this bill. We are very proud of the kind of work that he had done on this bill before he brought it to the Legislature and the consultations that he has undertaken to come to this stage.

This bill is important because it is about protecting the poor and the vulnerable in our society. That's why I think it's important for us to really move ahead with this legislation quickly: so that we can protect the vulnerable in our society. When people need money and sometimes don't have bank accounts, they go to these payday loan houses and borrow money. Sometimes the cost of borrowing that money is very high. We can't just talk about the interest; we need to talk about the total cost of borrowing. That's what this legislation really addresses.

Mr. Speaker, you may know that my background is in finance. I'm sure that when most of my colleagues go to the bank and want to borrow money, it's not just the interest that you look for; you look for the service fees, you look for the flat fees that the institution charges, and then you come up with that.

Let me just give you an example. If you are borrowing $1,000, even at 17%, month after month after month, the yearly cost comes to about $170, which may not appear to be a lot. But if, at the same time, there is a fee for the administration of the account, which could be $8 per month, it adds up to another $96 a year. Then there could be some other charges, like the cheque-cashing charges and so on. So, the total cost of borrowing could be quite substantial. It could be almost two and a half times the cost of the interest.

What is really important here is for us not only to look at the interest but to look at the total cost of borrowing. That is really important to everyone. That's why this legislation actually moves quite a way ahead on that front.

This legislation basically does some of the following things: It requires lenders and brokers to be licensed, and that's the right thing to do, so that we know that these people are the good people and they are regulated and licensed.

This legislation also suggests that there should be an authority to regulate or set the total cost of borrowing. In that regard, what is being proposed in the bill is an expert advisory board which will recommend the total cost of borrowing for payday loans. This advisory group will come from social and poverty groups, the business community and academic people. We are bringing all sorts of experts to say that what is really important here is the total cost of borrowing and what level it should be set at. So those people will give us some advice on that front.

The board will consult for input before they make recommendations on the upper limit of the total cost of borrowing for various payday loan agreements. Very soon, the interested parties will be able to make presentations and talk about where this limit should be set, if that's what is required.

But what is also really important is that, for the people who get into this trap—you know, they borrow this month, then they borrow next month, and so on and so

forth—this proposed legislation prohibits back-to-back and concurrent loans as well. What happens is, sometimes you do these things on the spur of the moment and you don't realize you have signed an agreement. It has happened to all of us at certain stages or certain points in our lives. What this legislation allows is that if you have entered into an agreement and you think it's not a fair agreement, it gives you at least 48 hours to get out of the agreement.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That's very important.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: As my colleagues here at the back says, it is really important.

Then again, it proposes some serious penalties for lenders who break the law. So on the one hand we are saying that we need to regulate them and then we are saying we will set up a total-cost-of-borrowing limit with the assistance of the experts. We are also suggesting that there should be no concurrent loans and that people should be able to get out of these agreements within 48 hours. It also imposes serious penalties. So it basically covers a lot of angles.

But we have to see why people do this. Some of these people who are borrowing money are the people who actually can't go to banks. They cannot borrow at rates that other people can borrow at. These payday loan houses also provide a useful service because they meet the needs of the people who need to borrow money when they really need it. We need to be fair to both: We need to make sure people are not being taken advantage of but at the same time we need to make sure that our small businesses are also looked after.

If we set an arbitrary rate—which is being suggested and which is also being proposed by some other provinces—let's just look at what will happen. If you set an arbitrary rate and you don't take into account the fact that business people have certain costs under which they operate—that's why we need to have this expert panel. It will take into account what will be a reasonable total cost of borrowing. If you don't do that and you just come up with an arbitrary rate in the legislation, what will happen? These houses will disappear. They will go underground. If there is a niche or a market need that they fill, how will that get filled if they go underground? Where will these people go to get money? What will happen is that these activities will still go on, but they will not be above-board, they will be underground. And if they go underground, the cost of borrowing will exceed even what is happening right now.

What we want to do here is to make sure that we are fair to the people who are borrowing money, but we are also fair to the people who are lending money as well. This bill actually does both of those of those things in a very reasonable manner.

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I think it's important for us to understand how important these small businesses are for us as well. In our province, 99% of our businesses are small businesses, and they create almost 50% of all the jobs. Most of the new jobs are also created by the small businesses. Not only that, but I think $230 billion worth of economic activity is being created by the small businesses as well. We want to make sure that the small businesses, not only the star businesses, thrive and that we create the right kind of environment for them as well, as we move forward.

So from my point of view, when I look at this, I will say this is very good legislation. It has been well-thought-out. They have done extensive consultation on that front, and I see there were 20 written submissions here; 76% of the respondents were in favour of seeking designation under federal Bill C-26, 69% of the respondents supported licensing and 87% of the respondents supported limits on the cost of borrowing. If you look at all of the submissions that we got and what is included in this legislation, you see that most of the submissions that were given to us have been taken into account.

In the end, I feel that this bill strikes a good balance. It strikes a good balance between the needs of the business community and protecting the poor and vulnerable in our society. We need to move ahead with this quickly, and that's why we need the support of everyone. I want to again thank my colleague from Mississauga South and the minister for the work that he has done on this bill. I'm very proud that I will be able to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to react to the Minister of Small Business and his comments. He says, "Interest rates are not the only issue of concern"—and I agree with him—but what does he say about interest rates? I don't remember hearing what you said about that. I bet that if the Minister of Small Business had to go and get a loan and he was charged 35%, he'd just go ballistic—that would be my sense—and if he was charged 60%, he would go nuts; I am convinced he would go nuts. He would say, "This is insane"—and he's a financial guy. I know he would say that.

Yet when we're talking about poor people who have to go and get a loan because they can't get a loan from the bank, and they have to go to these other institutionalized sharks, he's saying, "No, interest rates are just not enough of an issue to worry about. There are other considerations." I say that interest rates are a huge consideration. If some of you are concerned about not fixing a number, why can't we go with 10%, 8% or 15%? We can adjust it another time. Why don't we do that for those who say, "We don't want to come back again; if we fix a number and we change our minds, we'd have to come back again"? Go with a lower number.

But, surely to God, it should be sinful in the minds of many Liberals that those who go—and they're not middle class; they're not financial planners; they're not rich bankers. No, they're people in need. The middle class go to the bank to get their loans because they get a good rate and a better rate. It's working people, and in some cases poor people, who go to get a loan. Why wouldn't we protect them from predators? Why wouldn't we make that effort? Why do we say it's okay?

This is what troubles me when Liberals speak about this, intellectualize and say, "Interest rates are not the only issue. There are other issues," yet do not comment that the interest rate at the moment is very high—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. I thank the honourable member. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to thank the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. He is a very practical, pragmatic person who has walked in the shoes of small business people. He has walked in the shoes of a newcomer to Canada. He has done it with his own blood, sweat and tears. He doesn't embellish things to the point of being unrealistic; he says, "We've got to do the best we can." This bill is a pragmatic attempt and a reasonable attempt.

Certainly there are some Pollyannish ideas out there about how we have to everything perfectly, but when they were in power, our NDP friends, they didn't even talk about this. They opened the floodgates and let them in when they were in power, and they blame one person. They were there in silence as they let all these people in. So we are trying to fix some of these things. We're not going to fix them perfectly, but it's a very valid attempt to correct a situation.

What I want to talk about is an interesting phenomenon that is occurring, and that's the responsibility of the banks. I don't know if you've noticed, but in certain areas or neighbourhoods that are a little marginalized, all of a sudden, the first to leave are the banks. I think the banks have some responsibility before they leave a neighbourhood, because they came into the neighbourhood when the neighbourhood was doing quite well, and they were doing quite well financially. Do they not have a responsibility to stay? I know I get complaints from some of my local residents and small business people who say, "I can't even go to a nearby bank anymore. I have to drive 20 minutes or a half-hour to make a small deposit in the bank," because the banks have closed their shops and many of their buildings are now auto parts stores, Pizza Pizza places. I think our banks have a responsibility to stay in our neighbourhoods to make sure that they help people who need reasonable loans and financial support. They shouldn't leave when the going gets tough.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I too want to congratulate the member from Mississauga South, who so ably carried this bill for the minister, and I too want to wish Minister McMeekin the best in his recovery. He has a riding adjacent to mine and we have many good conversations about hospital issues and other things.

I will be supporting this bill today; however, I think there is a bit of a double standard in here and that there needs to be some attention paid to how it moves forward through committee. The industry is relatively new. I mean, it's only really been going in Canada since the early 1990s, and it has been an unregulated industry. When all the fees are added, whether they are the set-up fees or the broker fees or the verification fees, and you add that to the interest that is applied to the amount that's borrowed, it far exceeds any maximum rate that's permitted by law. I think that is a very unequal, unfair, unlevel playing field for those people who find themselves in the challenging predicament of having to take a payday loan.

So I think it's necessary to have the full public consultation, as I truly believe all of our bills should have, and what I would stress is that I feel the cooling-off period that's being suggested is the right thing to do. A person should have the right to cancel the loan within one business day of applying or of receiving the initial advance. There is also the ability of the government to set a cap on the rate of interest. I think those are very important elements that need to be considered.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

The Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship has up to two minutes to respond.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I'm very thankful to the member from Trinity–Spadina, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, my colleague, and the member from Burlington.

When I talked about the total cost of borrowing, I didn't say that interest was not important. What I said was that what is really important is the total cost of borrowing, and the total cost of borrowing includes the interest cost, the fees and everything else that is included.

I think the member from Eglinton–Lawrence actually raised a very good point about the role that the banks need to play. Even in my role as the Minister of Small Business, I see sometimes that a business needs money and it's very hard for them to get money from the banks. We are having a lot of discussions with the banks on that front and saying, "Hey, it's really important for us to get the banks involved in providing those services." Even then, when you go to the bank and borrow money—you go to the bank or you go to the payday loan houses, wherever you go—you need to know what the total cost of borrowing is. You need to know what the interest rate is. You need to know what the service charges are. You need to know what the administration fees are. So at the end of the day, you need to say, "After taking all of this into account, does it make sense for me to borrow?"

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What we are suggesting in this bill is that we want to actually come up with some limit on the total cost of borrowing which will be fair to the borrower and also be fair to the people who are lending the money, so that the business can survive and thrive but, at the same time, so that we can also look after the interests of the borrowers, so that we can look after bond level and the poor of society.

As to some of the comments the member from Burlington made: I think a cooling-off period is important because sometimes people get into these contracts in a very hasty manner. If they have a 48-hour cooling-off period, at least they can think about it in a rational way and, if they have to get out of it, they can.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I rise to speak to Bill 48. As I came into the chamber today to be part of the first day of this second reading debate, I came in expecting that I would be supporting the bill. As I have listened to all the debate, I'm starting to get concerned about what is in the bill and what isn't in the bill and whether it's going to do what the government said it was going to do.

When people at home ask me, "What is it that a member of the opposition does? The Queen must have had some idea why she wanted a loyal opposition," I explain it in two ways. One, our responsibility is to make sure that we tell the public what is in the bill: things the government does not want to talk about, the things that are not the positives of a bill. Every piece of legislation has some of that, something negative to it. It's our job to put that out. The other thing that's very important that a member of the opposition must do is to point out to the general public where the government is missing the mark, when it says one thing and does something else, or the bill doesn't do what they suggested it would do.

I just want to make a point. I listened to the presentation of the member for Parkdale–High Park and her concern about what the bill does. Some of the information she used was totally contrary to what the minister said in the introduction of the bill.

I'll just point out where they did concede that they came together. The minister, in the press release, starts off by saying, "McGuinty Government Protecting Most Vulnerable Consumers." That would mean to me that there was something coming forward in the bill that would regulate the cost to those vulnerable consumers. We all know that when it comes to the payday loan industry—at least I thought, when I came in—the primary consumer who uses that service is a person who needs a quick, short-term loan to pay for the necessities they have or things they need to do before the actual payday comes. Then, hopefully, they have the ability to pay that back with a reasonable fee to the company for providing that service.

I don't agree with the member from Parkdale–High Park, who suggests that we should just get rid of these places. As much as we may say that banks should do it, credit unions should do it, we all know that they don't do it. With no collateral, you can't get a loan from a credit union or from a bank to tide you over till Friday. They don't have a process in place to do that. It takes them longer than that to approve a loan. So we can't not have these organizations, but at the same time I would have thought, if the minister was serious when he said that this is to protect the most vulnerable consumers, that somehow this would do that.

We have heard that there is no cap. So, when I heard the member from Parkdale–High Park suggest that she wanted a cap of 35% or 36% interest, I thought that that sounded like a pretty high interest rate. I don't pay quite that high an interest rate when I borrow money. But of course we realize that it's short-term, that there's a lot of paperwork to a small loan, so maybe there's some rationale to it. But when I looked in the bill, not only is there no hard cap; there are no figures in the bill, no numbers. It doesn't say whether it's going to be 100%, 200% or 300%. All it says is that they must post it. So what the bill really is—I guess we'll get into it a little more deeply as I go—is it gives the government the ability to license the payday loan business and, I expect, charge a fee to do that.

Then the bill talks about enforcement. It doesn't talk about dealing with a complaint where the consumer calls our constituency office and says, "I've been ripped off by this company. What can you do about it?" I guess I would say, "Call the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations." That's not what it's called now, but I've been getting used to saying that over the years. But the answer is always, "Yes, that's covered under the act, but you have to get it enforced in the courts." If they're having a debate about an overcharge of $100 on a $200 loan and they have to go and see a lawyer to take that to court, that person is in trouble.

If we look at the reason that the bill is here, it's for consumer protection for those vulnerable consumers. We have just eliminated their ability to deal with this bill at all. I don't think that the answer to their problem is to make sure that the people they're dealing with are licensed if the licence does not direct how they must operate their business—and incidentally, in this bill it doesn't do that. If the government's intention was to do that, why wouldn't they have included some of that in the bill? Have a section in the bill somewhere—and it might be here; I can't find it. I found the sections on enforcement and licensing and that you can call them if you have somebody doing business without a licence. But there's nothing in the bill on what is required on behalf of the licensee—what it is they have to put up or what they have to do in order to get a licence. They just have to call up and say, "I've got enough money. I'd like to lend it to my friends and I'd like to charge 300%. Could you give me a licence?" I expect the minister would say, "If you have $300, you give me $150 of it and we'll let you lend the other $150 to the consumer, and we'll all be happy." The licenser will say, "That's great stuff, because I'll soon get my $150 licence back because on the first loan I will double my money." Everybody's happy except the consumer. We didn't protect that consumer whom we were talking about.

I just don't believe that the government is hitting the mark that they set out in this news release. It says, "The new Payday Loans Act, if passed, will enhance consumer protection by licensing all payday lending industry operators and banning controversial lending practices." I wonder where in the bill they have that. There's nothing in the bill that says that there's anything—they don't define what a controversial practice would be, and there's nothing that says, "We will stop all the lenders from controversial practices." Where would that come from? I don't think it exists. I don't think it does that. Again, I think they missed it.

"In a continuing effort to protect Ontario's most vulnerable consumers in need of short-term loans, a process to place a cap on total costs of borrowing, an inspection and enforcement regime and an education campaign will empower consumers to make informed decisions and ensure integrity in lenders' borrowing practices." I would ask the parliamentary assistant—I know he's listening intently—that, in response to my presentation, he could maybe explain to me where in the bill this is going to "ensure integrity in lenders' borrowing practices." It just isn't there.

I'm sure that the minister, when he gets back from his illness—and we look forward to that being very soon and we wish him well—he's going to say, "I'm going to do that in regulation." Fair business practices, fair lending practices, are not something that has to change from day to day. Fairness is as fair tomorrow as it is today. It's not something that you need to do by regulation. It's something that you should put in the legislation—the very reason you brought the legislation into place. This isn't supposed to be a bill about licensing people; this is supposed to be a bill about protecting the consumer. That's not what this bill does.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the hour is fast approaching quitting time for this evening. We do have more to do, but I'm sure that with your good graces you will allow me to continue with the presentation at a future date, when this bill is called again.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member.

I want to once again thank our pages for doing a great job. We wish you well in life.

It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday, April 28, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

ERRATUM

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Sunday 27 April 2008

Dimanche 27 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Sunday 27 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Dimanche 27 avril 2008

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to arrange this afternoon's proceedings as follows:

The House will immediately proceed to introduction of bills for the purpose of introducing one bill, following which the Speaker will call for orders of the day;

The order for second reading shall be called immediately, and 10 minutes shall be allocated to each recognized party for second reading debate, following which the Speaker shall put the question for second reading of the bill without further debate or amendment;

Upon passage of the second reading stage of the bill, the order for third reading shall be called immediately and the Speaker shall put the question without further debate or amendment; and

Upon completion of consideration of third reading of the bill, the Speaker shall immediately adjourn the House until Monday, April 28, 2008, at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TORONTO PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICE RESUMPTION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA REPRISE DES SERVICES DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN DE TORONTO

Mr. McGuinty, on behalf of Mr. Duguid, moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 66, An Act to resolve labour disputes between the Toronto Transit Commission and Local 113, Amalgamated Transit Union, Lodge 235, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, and Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 2 / Projet de loi 66, Loi visant à régler les conflits de travail entre la Commission de transport de Toronto et la section locale 113 du Syndicat uni du transport, la section locale 235 de l'Association internationale des machinistes et des travailleurs et travailleuses de l'aérospatiale et la section locale 2 du Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Premier for a short statement?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will save my remarks for debate.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TORONTO PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICE RESUMPTION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA REPRISE DES SERVICES DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN DE TORONTO

Mr. McGuinty, on behalf of Mr. Duguid, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 66, An Act to resolve labour disputes between the Toronto Transit Commission and Local 113, Amalgamated Transit Union, Lodge 235, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, and Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 2 / Projet de loi 66, Loi visant à régler les conflits de travail entre la Commission de transport de Toronto et la section locale 113 du Syndicat uni du transport, la section locale 235 de l'Association internationale des machinistes et des travailleurs et travailleuses de l'aérospatiale et la section locale 2 du Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I rise to speak to the legislation we are presenting this afternoon, but before I do, I wish to offer a few words of thanks.

I'll begin by thanking the people and the businesses of Toronto for meeting this disruption in their lives with their characteristic goodwill, patience and grace.

I'd like to thank my colleagues on all sides of this House. You've come together on very short notice and taken leave of your weekend routines and your families to serve the people of Ontario. Ontarians, I know, will be grateful that you have acted on their behalf.

It is the people of Ontario we are serving today. By acting on behalf of Toronto workers, families and businesses, we are acting in the best interests of all Ontarians. It goes without saying that Toronto, our capital city, plays an important role for all Ontarians, and we all need

Toronto to be strong so Ontario can be strong. That is why we are bringing this legislation forward today, together. I have every confidence that in the days ahead we will continue to work together to see this situation resolved.

Lastly, I have a request of TTC users. I ask that, upon restoration of TTC services, users extend their usual courtesy to workers there for the invaluable service they provide. It seems to me that, going forward, courtesy and goodwill are the foundation upon which we should all seek to build.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I rise today to speak to legislation that would end the labour dispute between the Toronto Transit Commission and three unions: Local 113 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Lodge 235 of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 2. If passed, this legislation would restore normal TTC services.

Like the Premier, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the co-operation and support, thus far, from the opposition parties. It's in moments like this when members of the Legislature put aside partisan politics in an effort to protect and preserve the public interest.

Allow me also to express my thanks and gratitude to the political staff and the public servants: the dispute resolution services, cabinet office, the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Clerk of the House and her great staff, and of course my own great staff in the Ministry of Labour. Mr. Speaker, you and your staff also deserve thanks for coming here on a Sunday to help us move forward with this initiative. Many of these staff have worked tirelessly throughout the weekend, and I want to thank them for that. I think members should acknowledge the work that they've done.

Applause.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The TTC, as Mayor Miller has often said, is the backbone, the lifeblood, of Canada's largest city. Toronto is the engine of the economy of both Ontario and Canada, and when people can't get to work, that's a major problem.

Our government respects and believes in the collective bargaining process. At the Ministry of Labour, we have seasoned professionals who work with unions and employers to help them to resolve their differences. At all times, they are available to help them craft agreements that meet the needs of both sides. In fact, during the time of this government, more than 97% of all negotiations have been successfully resolved without a work stoppage. We're proud of this record. It is our belief that the best agreements are indeed settled at the bargaining table. We encourage the TTC and its unions to continue bargaining and to reach a mutually acceptable agreement.

At the same time, we cannot stand by while the dispute shuts down this vital transportation system in Toronto, affecting millions of people and businesses. It would be irresponsible for us in this Legislature to allow the TTC to remain closed and ignore the fact that almost 1.5 million riders a day depend on it to go to work, to get to school, to conduct business, to attend medical appointments and to enjoy what this city has to offer.

Most of us cannot afford to be away from work. Many cannot afford the costly alternatives to public transit. Our most vulnerable residents will feel the impact and the hardships of this strike most severely.

The TTC is integral to reducing the burden of traffic congestion on the streets and public highways of Toronto. The shutdown will create traffic gridlock. This does more than simply inconvenience drivers. If more cars are on the road, this will translate into higher pollution levels, with the related health effects and impact on our environment. More importantly, this can severely impact emergency services, making it difficult to respond quickly to life-threatening situations.

A shutdown of the service has severe financial ramifications that extend far beyond the boundaries of Toronto and far beyond the TTC service area. For these reasons, we're acting with a measure of decisiveness to quickly have this service restored.

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Our mediators have worked with the parties for many weeks to assist them. We're introducing this legislation only after all parties have been given every opportunity to resolve the matter themselves. If passed, the bill introduced today would end the ongoing work stoppage at the TTC immediately upon royal assent. Employees would be required to resume their duties without delay, and the TTC would be required to resume normal operations.

There would also be a prohibition on any further strike or lockout with respect to this round of collective bargaining. The TTC and each of its three unions would have five days following royal assent to agree on the appointment of a mediator-arbitrator and to notify the Minister of Labour. If they are unable to agree, the minister would appoint a mediator-arbitrator who is, in the minister's opinion, qualified to act. The mediator-arbitrator would begin work within 30 days of appointment and be required to make the decision within 90 days. The decision would address all matters necessary to conclude a new collective agreement. The length of the agreement would have to be at least three years. In making the award, the mediator-arbitrator would be required to take into consideration certain typical criteria, including the employer's ability to pay and contract terms for other similarly situated employees.

I'm asking the members of the House to grant speedy passage of this legislation. The public interest demands that we do this quickly. Again, we've introduced this bill to ensure that 1.5 million people who rely on public transit will be able to do so. We continue to respect the collective bargaining process and we always will. In coming together today as a Legislature, we're ensuring that all three parties are working in the public interest. The public interest demands that we do this quickly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'll be sharing my time with the member for Thornhill.

On Saturday evening, I think it was, John Tory, our party leader, indicated that we would be prepared to support speedy passage of legislation settling this strike quickly if indeed the government ensured there were appropriate ability-to-pay references in the legislation. I compliment the government for doing just that. I think it indicates that this will recognize significant concerns with respect to the fiscal situation in the city of Toronto and the economic situation in the rest of the province beyond the city of Toronto.

I think it's a safe assumption, given the Premier's earlier comments about his willingness to be receptive to consideration of essential-services legislation if the city of Toronto asks for it—I suspect, given that commitment, that it's probably likely that we will be looking at that situation in the not-too-distant future. I think it's fair to say that currently the right to strike is illusory. There's no stronger statement of that fact than that we're sitting here today, trying to move as quickly as possible to resolve this situation.

I just want to put on the record that if we do go down that road, from our perspective in the Progressive Conservative Party, we think we should be moving extremely cautiously. I've been involved at the provincial level for over 27 years and in municipal politics for over eight years, and I know that the whole issue surrounding arbitration awards has been a contentious one for many, many years, and continues to be one. The impacts it has on municipal budgets and on smaller municipalities who have to bear the brunt of the ripple impact of arbitration awards is a serious one. We have to ensure that if we ultimately do move in this direction, we take a close look at all of those impacts. I will use as an example the retention bonus provided to the police service in Toronto initially, which was a valid request at the time—it was losing police officers. But that, as the Premier and others know, has rippled right across the province to virtually every police service in the province—those who do not have any real concerns about retention of officers. So those are the kinds of things where we would be very cautious about looking at mandatory constraints, not guidelines, on arbitrators.

I think this bill, Bill 174 and the criteria related to the ability to pay is perhaps a good test case for us in terms of how the arbitrator, at the end of the day, interprets those directions and what impact they have on the municipal budget and on small businesses, other businesses. This has an impact not just in the public sector but as well right across the private sector, especially in the municipality being directly impacted.

I don't know—none of us know, I suppose, in this assembly—whether this was a real rejection of the offer that was on the table or internal politics. We're hearing differing versions of that. But I want to echo what the Premier said in terms of the citizens of Toronto not reacting badly to the folks who work hard every day in the TTC. It is in many respects a challenging job, and becoming an even more dangerous one in some situations, and we all recognize that. So I would urge and encourage, along with the Premier: Don't show those resentments. I think there certainly is some anger and frustration, and some of that is well deserved. I think it has to be directed towards the leadership of the union who failed to meet a commitment with respect to notice and, by doing so, put many people in dangerous situations. We have heard concerns about young women being stranded, and others, elderly, being stranded—many people put in very, very difficult situations. This was irresponsible; in the view of many, outrageous and selfish. I believe that at the end of the day, the leadership of this union or unions owes an apology to the good people of Toronto.

This is a critically important service. I know the Minister of Labour talked about its economic impact, and the human cost as well, but I wanted to stress that I wasn't aware of how significant it was in terms of environmental impact. One subway line in Toronto takes 53,000 automobiles per hour off the road during rush hour. The TTC carries the equivalent of 365 million automotive trips annually, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than eight megatonnes a year. So that's a consideration that we have to always keep in mind as well as we go forward.

So I congratulate the government on bringing this legislation forward. We will be supporting it. If, at the end of day, the Premier does make a commitment to move forward with other indications that he's given to the city of Toronto, hopefully he will be as receptive to working with us in terms of addressing how we approach that as he has been in terms of this legislation.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I've been a member of this House since last October, and I've never gotten angry; I've never arrived at this building angry. That changed this weekend.

My anger is not personal. My anger is an expression of what I'm hearing on the streets of Toronto and particularly in my riding. I speak for Thornhill, which, of course, is in the near 905, with 150,000 residents of that constituency to a large extent very dependent on the TTC in their daily lives. I live and work here in Toronto, and I use the TTC myself.

People are angry, and justifiably so. No one likes surprises. People want dependability, and, as the Premier has ably pointed out, people want courtesy. They have indeed extended courtesy this weekend one to another, but they want it in return. I wanted to make mention of that fact. People are angry at the amalgamated transit workers' union, they are angry at Mayor David Miller, they are angry at TTC Chair Adam Giambrone and, to an extent, they are angry at the McGuinty government. They are angry to the point where the words "essential service" are being heard spoken all over this city this weekend. No one likes that, but it is what I've been hearing. Indeed, we, this Legislature, are declaring the TTC to be an essential service on a one-time basis this weekend, because people need the TTC. We need the TTC on a regular basis.

Ask yourself whether you'd be feeling something akin to anger if you were the nurse who had left a hospital shift at midnight on Friday, expecting to get home, and

had not been able to do so; ask yourself if you'd been the youngster from my riding who went down to the Toronto entertainment district on Friday night and got out without the $40 in pocket to get back to Thornhill absent the TTC, and I think you'll understand what it is I mean.

1350

Our party has stated that we support arbitration. In the arbitration process, what we want to see is the ability to pay. We're happy that's been included in the bill.

I believe that the amalgamated transit workers expected the events of Friday to occur based on comments in the media that the union's leadership issued last week, not 24 hours prior to the ostensible settlement. That suggests a lack of reliability on the union's part, and it's the main reason why people are angry.

I've been a small businessman myself; I've been through a strike like this. I might point out that that strike was parallel to a postal strike. I felt personally threatened. I felt threatened for my business. I felt threatened for myself because I not only couldn't collect money; I ran a 24/7 business that required people to be there, and the only way to get them there was to drive through a city clogged with cars and pick them up myself. I didn't want to see this happen. So I'm delighted that we're here today and we're going to take care of that.

If you want respect, I think we all know you have to give it. That is a message to the union. We support this legislation, but I for one do not want to see this happen again, and on behalf of the people served by the TTC, I think the union indeed does owe Torontonians an apology.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to take just a few minutes to address this legislation. As a matter of principle, New Democrats believe that the best way to settle the issues which inevitably arise in our workplaces is through collective bargaining. We believe also that using back-to-work legislation is something that should be avoided unless you have the most extraordinary of circumstances. I believe that historical fact supports our position. In fact, over 95% of collective agreements are worked out and settled at the bargaining table. Anywhere that I have been, a record of 95% is usually an A+. I don't think we celebrate that enough—the fact that in our society most working people come to the workplace and work very hard and in good faith to achieve agreements that both management and workers can live with and that the public will benefit from. I think we should celebrate that more.

Nonetheless, we have a circumstance here which I believe is an extraordinary circumstance. The members of the ATU, the members of CUPE and the members of the International Association of Machinists have bargained for many, many days. I think we all recognize that that bargaining has been very complex and at a number of levels, trying to deal with some issues that have been around for a long time, some issues that are new and some that involve the safety of the people who work for the TTC, which is increasingly—unfortunately—an issue out there. When people go to work at the TTC and fear for their own safety on the job, that is a real issue and an issue that I think is becoming more serious all the time.

People worked very hard, both on behalf of TTC management and on behalf of the three trade unions, to find a collective agreement. I think we also need to recognize that much was accomplished; many issues were dealt with. Unfortunately, we're at the stage now where we recognize that there are some issues which probably cannot be settled at the bargaining table. Indeed, I was told yesterday that the parties got back together again but it was very difficult to move on any of the apparent issues.

So what is to be done in those circumstances? There are a number of interests to consider. There are all of those people in the greater Toronto area who utilize the Toronto Transit Commission to get to work themselves and to get to doctor appointments and to get to school and to get their children to child care and do all the other things that happen in a very large urban agglomeration like this. There are also the issues of whether this city can even work minus the TTC on an ongoing basis. Finally, you have to consider, as I said earlier: Is there a likely prospect that things will be settled by further discussions at the bargaining table?

I think, on all of those fronts, the recognition arrived at yesterday is that there are serious interests here that need to be addressed—public interests, human interests, the interests of the city—and also the fact that bargaining is probably at an impasse. For that reason, we will support this legislation.

We do not support it without reservation. As I read the bill that has been put forward—and I want to say this very clearly—there is language in the preamble that does cause us some concern. It causes us concern, and I'll say it here so that someone will not try to recite it two or three months from now and say, "Oh, you supported it then without reservation, so why not support it now?" There are real issues that need to be addressed, real issues that need to be addressed today, and that's what we're here to do.

The issue of essential-service legislation is something quite separate and apart. I think we should keep it separate and apart. Indeed, when essential-service legislation was mentioned over the last five or six days in the context of this labour dispute, I think it added a whole new level of complexity. If urban municipalities, if workers and if this Legislature want to consider essential-service legislation, then let's pick a time and a place to have that debate. But I think it's the wrong time to have that debate now, when we're trying to settle some very specific issues in terms of this workplace and in terms of these workers and in terms of this public service. So to the extent that the preamble might try to indicate that this is essential-service legislation, we reject that.

We recognize that there are important questions that need to be dealt with here and now in terms of this collective agreement, in terms of these bargaining agents and in terms of this management, and that's what we should do today. If we want to have that other philosophical debate about essential-service legislation, then

let's have that at some other time, when 1.5 million people aren't worrying about whether or not they'll be able to get to work tomorrow. So that is our position.

We too hope that the public, come tomorrow morning, will be able to get to work, will be able to get to school and will be able to do the things they need to do. We also hope that there will be goodwill—goodwill on all sides. It is never an easy decision to go on strike. Having spent, some would say, too much time on picket lines, I know it is never an easy decision. No worker ever wants to go on strike. That happens, though, when you feel that the normal mechanisms for working through disputes and working through issues somehow aren't getting you there.

So I hope that tomorrow people on all sides will go to work in the spirit of goodwill. I hope that very soon the union and the TTC will be able to agree on an arbitrator. I know they've exchanged some names already and they've started to narrow down the names they would consider as mediator-arbitrator. And I hope the issues that were not able to be resolved at the bargaining table will now be resolved, whether through further bargaining with the aid of a mediator or, finally, through an arbitration settlement.

It is never easy to simply legislate someone back to work, but I think we've faced the reality that there is no better option, given where we're at today. So we hope that people will go to work tomorrow with goodwill, and we hope that we will focus our efforts on this issue and on resolving these issues, and leave the other philosophical discussions which some folks may want to have to another date and another time, when the lives, safety and activities of 1.5 million people are not immediately going to be affected.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. McGuinty has moved second reading of Bill 66. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

TORONTO PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICE RESUMPTION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA REPRISE DES SERVICES DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN DE TORONTO

Mr. McGuinty, on behalf of Mr. Duguid, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 66, An Act to resolve labour disputes between the Toronto Transit Commission and Local 113, Amalgamated Transit Union, Lodge 235, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, and Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 2 / Projet de loi 66, Loi visant à régler les conflits de travail entre la Commission de transport de Toronto et la section locale 113 du Syndicat uni du transport, la section locale 235 de l'Association internationale des machinistes et des travailleurs et travailleuses de l'aérospatiale et la section locale 2 du Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1401.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
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Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the committee of the whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (L)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (L)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Tourism / ministre du Tourisme
Gélinas, France (ND)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (L)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (L)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (ND)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (L)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, David (L)	Sault Ste. Marie	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (L)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader of the Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Minister of Revenue / ministre du Revenu
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Greg (L)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Opposition House leader / leader parlementaire de l'opposition
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	

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First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 28 April 2008

Lundi 28 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 28 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 28 avril 2008

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The problem with the proposed new standing orders is not the number of hours in the Legislature, as the Premier likes to imply. I will be here as early as he would like me to start. I don't know any member on either side who got into politics to work less hours. I object to the concept that the only time members of this House are working is when they're in the Legislature. When question period ends, the Premier and most of his cabinet ministers are out the door. Does that mean they have finished work for the day?

Part of my job is commuting from Woodstock when the Legislature is sitting. I still stop to talk to my constituents who are in Tim Hortons at 5 a.m. I still drive back to events in Oxford in the evenings and spend my weekends, like most MPPs, going to events, anniversaries and birthdays. I'm not asking for a reward. I think the people of Oxford gave me that reward by re-electing me.

I'm asking the Premier to give the members of this House respect by acknowledging that our objections to these proposed standing order changes is that he is decreasing democracy instead of making the Legislature work better. We don't need more hours of debate if cabinet ministers won't listen and fix the problems that are raised. We don't need more private members' public business if the government House leader blocks private members' bills from ever moving forward. We don't need to move question period if the government refuses to answer any questions and just throws back rhetoric and insults. We need a real debate about how to improve the Legislature, with input from all parties, where every member gets the respect they deserve.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I presided recently over two Ontario Volunteer Service Awards ceremonies held in Mississauga, where a total of 252 outstanding volunteers were honoured, individuals who had given in excess of 3,200 total years of service to agencies and individuals within the Peel region. I'm proud to say that many of my constituents of Brampton–Springdale received awards for their outstanding volunteer service. I'd also like to congratulate them all on being so generous with their time.

The time that Ontario volunteers give to volunteerism is valued at over $10 billion annually by Statistics Canada—individuals like Peter Murphy, our local town crier, who volunteers his time at the Peel Heritage Complex, which is a museum and art gallery and houses the original Peel county courthouse. As the official town crier, Mr. Murphy makes formal announcements or proclamations on behalf of the mayor and city council at all important functions. He understands the importance that pageantry and elegance add to the event and acts as a unique community ambassador.

This month, thousands of people will be recognized for their good deeds at 46 Ontario Volunteer Service Awards ceremonies in 35 communities across the province. When Ontarians volunteer, they're donating their time and their talent to build and strengthen our community, one person at a time. I'd like to thank all those individuals who make a positive impact on others.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mr. Norm Miller: Despite concerns raised by journalists, academics and members of this Legislature, the government is still willing to push ahead with its changes to the standing orders designed to avoid public scrutiny and erode democratic accountability. In an unprecedented move, members of the press galley have written a letter highlighting their grave misgivings with the new schedule, which would limit reporters' access to cabinet ministers and the Premier.

University of Toronto professor Graham White noted that effective questions require time for planning, research and reflection, something that would be severely undermined under the proposed changes.

Question period remains the most visible and effective mechanism for holding a government to account, and the proposed changes diminish its importance.

This is about more than simple changes to rules of debate; it is about maintaining democratic accountability, and that is something that all Ontarians should be very concerned about.

If the government is serious about making this Legislature more effective and family-friendly, it will listen to the many voices who oppose these changes and will stop using its majority to change the rules of the House for its own benefit.

DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Paul Miller: On April 7, 1988, an NDP resolution introduced in the Ontario Legislature recognized April 28 as a provincial day of mourning and noted that, at that time, 1,000 Canadian workers were killed on the job each year, with thousands more injured, many of them permanently. Many thousands of other workers suffer work-related disease, often leading to death.

In 1991, an NDP-sponsored federal private member's bill was enacted proclaiming April 28 of each year as a national day of mourning. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, commemoration activities are now held in nearly 100 countries.

Many young people are about to head out to their first summer jobs, and I worry about them. As parents, we caution our children on how to make the best of their first jobs, but unless our children are heading into unknown fields, such as a tree planting job, we may not think to raise workplace safety issues with them. I encourage parents to think about the safety concerns that their children could face and to discuss these with them before they leave for their first day at work.

I encourage employers to think very carefully about the dangers that young and new workers could be facing.

April 28 provides a time when all Canadians and people throughout the world can jointly pay respect to those working people who have died or suffered injuries or diseases on the job.

While we mourn the dead and remember the injured, we must dedicate ourselves to fight for the living and prevent this terrible escalating and unnecessary toll.

For those workers who have been injured on the job, I will continue my efforts to get the many flawed processes fixed so that the insurance protection that you rightly deserve works for you.

To those injured and deceased workers and their families, on this day we think of you and commit to you our best efforts to learn from your stories and to fight for the changes necessary to protect workers.

GEORGE JEFFREY CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Mr. Bill Mauro: I rise today to speak about the great work being done in my riding by the George Jeffrey Children's Centre and Fresh Air Experience.

Last Thursday, the northern Ontario heritage fund provided an additional $1 million to the George Jeffrey Children's Foundation to aid in the construction of a new and larger state-of-the-art children's centre for Thunder Bay. This brings the McGuinty government's total investment in the George Jeffrey Children's Centre up to $7.3 million.

It's a very important service for our community. I'm pleased that the new 35,000-square-foot facility will expand its services for children with disabilities. Programs will include physiotherapy and speech language pathology for more than 1,000 children each year. In addition, this project will create jobs and help recruit new health professionals to the region.

Adding to this contribution is our local Fresh Air Experience 10K fundraiser. This year's run was the 29th edition of the event. I had the pleasure of participating with approximately 300 other runners, who were successful in raising thousands of dollars to help support the George Jeffrey Children's Centre. I congratulate overall winners Jonathan Balabuck and Nikki Wilberforce.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the staff and volunteers who helped organize and participate in this great cause. I'd specifically like to congratulate board chair Bob Speer; the centre's executive director, Eiji Tsubouchi; and Fresh Air Experience manager Al Cranston. Without the efforts of these tireless volunteers, none of this would be possible.

We all look forward to the completion of this incredible new facility in mid-October.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mrs. Julia Munro: This Liberal government wants question period held early in the day so that neither the opposition nor the media has the time to prepare.

Opposition members do not have the staff or resources of government ministers; neither do journalists. Other Parliaments and Legislatures recognize these facts. Federal question period starts at about 2:15; Alberta, Manitoba and Newfoundland start at about 1:30; BC at 1:50; and Nova Scotia, Quebec and Prince Edward Island, all after noon. Saskatchewan meets at 10:30 on Thursday but 2 p.m. on Monday to Wednesday.

1340

In Australia and New Zealand, questions are at 2 p.m. In Britain, question period is in the morning for half the week, but the British Prime Minister only answers questions one day a week in the afternoon. Ministers only have to answer one day every two weeks.

What is so different about Ontario that we need the earliest question period? I can tell you what is different: We have a government that is trying to erode the ability of the opposition and the media to hold them to account. And if they restrict our right to hold them to account, they restrict the right of the public to know what their government is doing.

EDUCATION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: The McGuinty government takes great pride in how far we have come in terms of our public education system. After years of Conservative rule, when classrooms were in chaos, this government has restored peace and stability in schools, which has allowed our students to excel.

For instance, in the Ottawa Catholic School Board, test scores for grade 3 reading, writing and math have increased by an average of 14 percentage points since 2003, while the test scores for grade 6 reading, writing and math have increased by an average of nine percent-

age points since 2003. In the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, test scores for grade 3 reading, writing and math have increased by an average of 16 percentage points since 2003, and the board's test scores for grade 6 reading, writing and math have increased by an average of eight percentage points since 2003.

I congratulate Lynn Scott, chair of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, and Kathy Ablett, chair of the Ottawa Catholic School Board, for these great achievements. Gone are the days when the Conservatives antagonized teachers, leading to constant strikes and no after-school activities.

We promised Ontario students in 2003 that we would rebuild our education system; that is exactly what we are doing. While test scores are only one measure of success, our students are clearly on their way to reaching their full potential. More students are now graduating from high school, gaining a solid foundation in reading, writing and math and getting more of the individual attention they need to succeed.

POLICE OFFICERS

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to welcome the police chiefs from across Ontario here with us today, along with the police services chairs who are here from across Ontario.

We know that Ontario's police forces are the cornerstones of community safety. As part of our commitment to stronger and safer communities, this government has invested more than $37 million annually to help municipalities hire 1,000 new police officers. Every one of these 1,000 police officers is on the job, making our communities safer 24/7. We are also continuing to fund the previous government's 1,000 officers program. Under the McGuinty government, these officers are being funded in perpetuity, ensuring that our towns and cities can plan for the long term. Altogether, that's $2 billion towards putting 2,000 officers on the streets of Ontario.

I'm quite pleased that Toronto was allocated 250 officers from our 1,000 officers program. This was on top of the 251 officers that we fund in perpetuity. Thanks to the 8,000 men and women in our police service here in Toronto, Toronto's crime rate is among the lowest in the country.

But just because crime rates are lower doesn't mean we can be complacent for one minute. This government is determined to keep our communities safe, and I'm certain that this determination is shared with the police services not only in Toronto but in every community across Ontario.

We're here again to welcome our police chiefs and the chairs of police services because we really value their contribution.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise in this House and welcome to Queen's Park the recipients of the June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Award for Voluntarism in Ontario. They will be arriving shortly from the awards ceremony this morning. There are 15 recipients of the award, and I thank all of them for their outstanding contributions.

I would like to recognize the Premier for his leadership in renaming the award after such an outstanding Ontarian. Thank you also, Minister Chan, for organizing such an important event, and for the minister's leadership in promoting volunteerism in Ontario.

Here today to receive the awards—and they'll soon be at Queen's Park: president Lori Nash from Orléans; secretary Charlene Elgee, also from Orléans; Karen Luttrell, public relations with the library; and Cathy MacDonald of the Nepean committee. Upon hearing that 10 of Ontario's public libraries were facing closure last year due to budget constraints, Lori and the Friends of the Ottawa Public Library Association rallied together to raise public awareness and lobby the city of Ottawa. Their SOS postcard campaign resulted in thousands of postcards sent by the public to Ottawa city council demanding that no libraries be closed and that library funding not be cut.

Council responded, announcing that all Ottawa public libraries would remain open. Ottawa Councillor Jan Harder, chair of the Ottawa Public Library board, and Barbara Clubb, Ottawa's city librarian, were so impressed with the group that they nominated the Friends for this prestigious award.

Congratulations again, Lori, Charlene, Karen and Cathy, for your well-deserved reward.

WEARING OF PINS

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would ask for unanimous consent for all members to wear the black and yellow pins that honour the National Day of Mourning today in the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

SPECIAL REPORT, OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a report of the Ombudsman of Ontario entitled Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me: Opening the Door on the Elton John Ticket Scandal: Investigation into City of Greater Sudbury Council Closed Meeting of February 20, 2008.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of a number of members, I'd like to introduce some guests who are with us today.

On behalf of the members for Hamilton Centre and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Bernie Morelli, chair of the Hamilton Police Services Board and chair of the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards, in the east members' gallery.

On behalf of the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, in the west members' gallery, we'd like to welcome Senator Bert Brown and his wife, Alice.

On behalf of the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North, we'd like to welcome his sister, Sarah Gravelle McKenzie, and his niece, Rebecca Campbell, visiting from Winnipeg, in the west members' gallery.

On behalf of the member for Mississauga South, in the west gallery, we'd like to welcome Henry Dennis and Julian Forte.

On behalf of the member for Burlington, we'd like to welcome, in the west members' gallery, Michael Marsan, a co-op student working at the member's constituency office.

On behalf of the member for Markham–Unionville, we'd like to welcome today to the Legislature the recipients of the June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Award for Voluntarism in Ontario: Dr. Daniel C. Andreae, Jack Byers, Dr. Balliram Cadee, Eileen Clifford, Margaret Everett, Robert Ewing, the Friends of the Ottawa Public Library Association, Barry Fuller, the Grand Valley Educational Society, Peter Henderson, Joan Jones, the Palliative Care Volunteers of Royal Victoria Hospital, the Vittoria and District Foundation, Andrea Tipping and James Valitchaka.

As well, I'll take this opportunity to welcome a former member for Mississauga West of the 34th and 35th Parliaments, the honourable Steve Mahoney.

Please extend a welcome to all of our guests here in the chamber today.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. David Caplan: I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 till 9:30 p.m. on Monday, April 28, for the purpose of conducting government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1349 to 1354.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Caplan has moved government notice of motion number 62. All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Fonseca, Peter	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Gravelle, Michael	Orazietti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Carroll, Aileen	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Chan, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Crozier, Bruce	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Dhillon, Vic	Matthews, Deborah	Van Bommel, Maria
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mauro, Bill	Watson, Jim
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Chudleigh, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Savoline, Joyce
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Tabuns, Peter
Horwath, Andrea	Miller, Paul	Yakabuski, John
Jones, Sylvia	Munro, Julia	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 48; the nays are 14.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EDUCATION WEEK
SEMAINE DE L'ÉDUCATION

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Today is a very special day in Ontario. We're celebrating Education Week and the success of our students.

Nous voulons un Ontario mieux instruit et plus hautement qualifié. C'est pourquoi nous sommes si déterminés à améliorer les connaissances et les compétences des Ontariennes et Ontariens.

When we provide our young people with the skills they need to succeed, we get the best workers who land the best jobs, who in turn build the strongest economy.

I recently released our vision paper Energizing Ontario Education, which presents our plan to continue building and energizing education in Ontario. It outlines how we will continue working with our partners in education to reach every student and to improve the publicly funded education system for Ontario's two million students.

J'ai le plaisir de dire qu'ensemble, avec l'aide de nos partenaires en éducation, nous aidons davantage d'élèves à réussir; nous bâtissons donc un avenir plus brillant pour l'Ontario.

At the high school level, more students are graduating and building a better future for themselves. Recently, we announced that 75% of kids are now graduating. That's 10,500 students more every year.

Clearly, Ontario has a great story to tell, and in honour of Education Week, I'm pleased to share the results of a pan-Canadian study released today; that's the pan-Canadian assessment program, or PCAP. This study shows

that our province's 13-year-old English-language students performed significantly better than students in all other provinces and territories in reading—across the country. In fact, 90% of Ontario's English-language students were at or above the expected level of achievement in reading. Ontario's English-language students scored at the Canadian average in science and were the only ones to score above the Canadian average in math.

I'm also pleased to say that Ontario's French-language students demonstrated a good level of achievement in each subject. Some 81% of Ontario's French-language students were at or above the expected level of achievement in reading.

These results all demonstrate that our government's education investments are paying off with positive results for students.

This is the third report in a row that demonstrates that Ontario students have excellent literacy skills. Ontario ranked among the top two jurisdictions in two recent reports: the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study and the Programme for International Student Assessment study.

In addition, the majority of results on all grades 3 and 6 Ontario reading, writing and math tests have improved by at least 10 percentage points since 2003.

1400

Les élèves de l'Ontario réalisent des exploits parce que nous avons pris l'engagement d'aider chacun d'entre eux à réaliser son plein potentiel. Congratulations to students, parents and educators on the work they've done to achieve such great results.

Monsieur le Président, je vous invite à applaudir avec moi les élèves de l'Ontario pour tous leurs succès en éducation and join me in celebrating Education Week in Ontario. Together, we'll continue to build the best possible publicly funded education system—one that inspires confidence in our communities and success in our students.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Today I am pleased to inform the Legislature that my ministry's highly successful and productive partnership with the University of Guelph has been renewed and improved. I want to thank the member from Guelph, Liz Sandals, for joining me this morning at the arboretum at the university to mark this new partnership with the president, Alastair Summerlee, staff from the University of Guelph and several agri-food stakeholders.

The agri-food industry currently contributes $30 billion to the provincial economy and employs more than 700,000 people. It is and will continue to be vital to the province's future.

This partnership contributes to that success and benefits all Ontarians. For instance:

—The combination of government, industry and academia has resulted in many research breakthroughs, such as omega 3 eggs and DHA milk;

—Laboratory testing by highly skilled scientists and staff at the university protect the food, our health and Ontario's reputation in global markets; and

—New, hardier crops and the latest production techniques improve farmers' profitability and our food choices.

There are many more contributions that the partnership has made to our quality of life and the prosperity of our agri-food sector. Today, I am happy to outline some of the new directions that we are taking.

First, we had the 2008 Ontario budget announcement of $56 million in one-time funding this year at the University of Guelph. I want to thank my colleague the Minister of Finance for recognizing the important work that the university does. This funding will go toward new research and innovation in areas like environmental protection and developing food health; an investment in animal health to help deal with emerging hazards; and improving veterinary training and placement to meet industry needs.

Today in Guelph, I announced that we have also signed the new university-Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs agreement. This agreement will provide approximately $300 million over the next five years for ongoing work. That is very good news. The research will be aligned with forward-looking priorities worked out with the help of our industry-led Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario. With this investment, our government has given the University of Guelph a very strong boost, and we've provided them with stable funding that is predictable for the future.

I want to thank the many people at the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the University of Guelph who spent long hours negotiating this agreement. I know that our agri-food sector and rural communities will benefit greatly over the long term. We're exploring new horizons and opportunities like car parts made from plant material; alternative fuels; new, hardier crops and new nutritionally enhanced food; better protection from diseases; and faster responses to emergencies.

Ontario can and will build on its position as a leader in agri-food innovation because we have the advantage of this unique partnership.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Hon. Michael Chan: National Volunteer Week is April 27 to May 3. This week is about inspiring, recognizing and encouraging people to volunteer. Volunteers are the lifeblood and heart of our communities. Ontario has a long tradition of volunteerism, and today volunteerism is one of the most important factors of modern life.

More than five million Ontarians volunteer every year. They give over 800 million hours of their time annually. They support many different areas in our communities, including arts, sports clubs, food banks, shelters, the environment, international relief efforts, services to newcomers—and the list goes on.

Ontario values volunteers. We recognize and honour them through a wide variety of programs. This week we salute hundreds of volunteers through three different awards ceremonies: the Volunteer Service Awards for five to 60 years of continuous service to an organization; the Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers, given to youth between the ages of 15 and 24, which will be presented on Friday, May 2; and we are privileged to have with us this afternoon the recipients of the June Callwood Award for Outstanding Achievement in Voluntarism in Ontario. I was privileged to be joined by the Premier this morning to present these volunteers with their awards.

This year, the Ontario government is focusing on young people for National Volunteer Week. We have issued a challenge to youth to volunteer and change the world. This is an exciting call to action for 14- to 18-year-olds to discover their power to make a difference. We call on them to volunteer individually or in groups during National Volunteer Week. The Ontario Volunteer Centre Network is helping us to promote the challenge in seven communities: Guelph, Hamilton, Kingston, Kitchener-Waterloo, Markham, Ottawa and Timmins.

ChangeTheWorld is another way the Ontario government is working to strengthen voluntarism in this province. We are also funding several programs aimed at increasing newcomer participation in the volunteer tradition.

I urge all members to support youth voluntarism province-wide. It is one of the highest expressions of good citizenship and of being part of the community. Youth are the future of our communities—our future leaders and volunteers.

POLICE SERVICES

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I rise today with great pleasure to pay tribute to two of my ministry's key partners in the critical job of keeping Ontarians safe. Today is Queen's Park Day for both the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police.

Permit me to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of representatives from both organizations. Representing the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards, we have Mr. Bernie Morelli, the outgoing president, and Mary Smiley, the incoming president. Representing the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, we have Chief William Blair of the Toronto Police Service, and Chief Ian Davidson of the Greater Sudbury Police Service, the first vice-president.

I would also like to welcome all the members who are in the gallery, and I want, on behalf of everyone in this Legislature, to thank you for the great work that you do.

This is the first time we are hosting these organizations jointly for Queen's Park Day, and I am delighted to welcome them to Queen's Park. Today we recognize them for the important leadership role they play and thank them for their significant contributions to law enforcement in Ontario. Ontario is a safe place to live due in large part to the work of the police chiefs and their employers, the police services boards. I want to thank them on behalf of the people of Ontario for the commitment they bring to their job.

Queen's Park days are a chance for legislators on both sides of the House to engage with key stakeholders in constructive dialogue, and it's through days like this one that we continue to build on partnerships that have proven to be strong and productive over many years.

Both of these organizations are concerned about crime and the safety of Ontarians. So too is the McGuinty government. We are proud of the many initiatives that we have undertaken to advance that agenda and of the level of collaboration with these organizations, our partners, that has helped accomplish our objectives.

The Ontario Association of Police Services Boards and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police have welcomed the government's efforts to help them hire more police officers to keep our communities safe. Through our Safer Communities-1,000 Officers program, an additional 1,000 police officers have been working in Ontario communities since 2003. We have committed more than $37 million per year in permanent funding to this program. Moreover, we have made funding permanent for a previous program for additional officers that was due to expire after five years. Together, both programs have delivered over 2,000 new officers with total provincial funding of $68 million per year, and that's in perpetuity. In doing this, we have responded to the needs expressed by our police partners.

1410

Recently, Premier McGuinty announced Ontario's participation in the federal government's police officers' recruitment fund. Ontario's share of that fund, $156 million over five years, is, to be honest, woefully inadequate. The program announced by the federal government is a limited five-year program that falls short of the mark. However, we will make the best use of these limited funds while we continue to lobby the federal government to provide full funding for Ontario's fair share of the number of officers promised. We're also asking the federal government to make the funding permanent so that police services boards and their communities can continue to have the services of these additional officers after five years.

I welcome Queen's Park Day as an opportunity for my colleagues on both sides of the House to participate in an important dialogue regarding issues such as this, and I appreciate this occasion to tell these valuable partners how much we value their work and to thank them for all they do to keep us safe. Our government will continue to work to ensure that our partnership with the OACP and the OAPSB continue to thrive.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements by ministries? Responses?

EDUCATION WEEK

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to applaud the efforts of the students, teachers and parents

across the province of Ontario who have worked hard to achieve the excellent Pan-Canadian Assessment Program scores. After careful examination of the PCAP report, there are a few questions that beg the minister's attention. It would be interesting to know why the results of the French-language students were not as strong as the results of the English-language students. And, in the face of declining enrolment and school closures throughout Ontario, how will rural students be able to continue to exceed Canadian averages if they are forced to spend more time in transit?

While this report provides legislators, school boards, teachers and principals with a snapshot of our children's progress in various subjects, the value of this report is only what we learn from it. We must delve deeper into the questions that it has raised. I urge the minister to report back to this Legislature with a plan to improve the areas of opportunity within the report for our children and for our grandchildren.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to start by commending the University of Guelph for all the good work that they do. I wish I could believe that this funding would be implemented properly, but after seeing the many problems of the cattle, hog and horticulture program, I have concerns. The minister used old data. Farmers who had sold their stock and retired got cheques, but young and expanding farmers who needed money to stay in business and feed their families didn't qualify.

I heard from a greenhouse operator in Leamington that had expanded from four acres to 29 acres. They should be Ontario's success story, but the McGuinty government program didn't take into the account the expansion, so they got $165,000 less than they were expecting and needed. I heard from one farmer who didn't apply for the federal cost of production payment because he would have received less than $100, but now he doesn't qualify for the provincial program. There's no application and no appeal.

I support the University of Guelph, but because of all these examples of farmers that this government has failed, I get concerned when this minister takes out her chequebook—or should I say her announcement book?

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Peter Shurman: It gives me great pleasure to rise and respond to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on his recognition of National Volunteer Week and all the great volunteers and the work they do throughout our society. Events are being held across Ontario, indeed Canada, celebrating volunteers. You find volunteers in every facet of our society: in our schools, in our hospitals and in our volunteer fire services. Just check out what's happening in our churches, our synagogues, our mosques and our temples. We have volunteer leaders for Scouts, Guides, athletic clubs and my own favourite volunteer effort, VoicePrint, the national reading service for the sight-impaired.

Our society could not exist without volunteers. You cannot buy what they contribute. I commend the minister for his good words and add my thanks to all volunteers for their dedication. I too invite our younger volunteers to change the world.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I would like to welcome the OACP and the Association of Police Services Boards to Queen's Park today as well. Thank you very much for the fine work you do. In particular, I'd like to welcome Chief Paul Hamelin from Midland Police Services, a former president of the OACP, who is here with us as well.

The comments coming out of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services amused me. He takes credit for the 2,000 police officers that were added to Ontario. First of all, it was the Tory government that added the first 1,000 police officers, and without the pressure we put on this government, they would not be here today. We continually put the pressure on—you know it—and we take credit for making sure those 1,000 police officers are in place today.

Now let's talk about the $156 million from the federal government that, a few days before the announcement, they were adamantly opposed to, but finally they signed on. I guess they're embarrassed by it, but imagine not being willing to take $156 million. Can you imagine that? If that money was spent wisely, and they started right today, there would be 1,000 new police officers in the province of Ontario at the end of five years: 500 for these police services we see here today and 500 for the non-municipal contract policing of the OPP. That's what we should have happen—not embarrassing the federal government every time they get an opportunity. If they could possibly negotiate with the federal government, it might have been sustainable funding. We'll make sure, when we're back in government, that we will have sustainable funding from the federal government.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr. Peter Kormos: New Democrats join in welcoming the chiefs of police and police services board members here to Queen's Park. It's particularly challenging for these boards and administration and police services across this province as municipal funding becomes more and more difficult—municipalities still absorbing huge amounts of downloaded burden—policing becoming more complex, more sophisticated and still having as its primary need staffing, adequate levels of police officers out there protecting our communities, our neighbourhoods and our families.

I, on behalf of New Democrats, want to take the opportunity to raise these special concerns around native policing. Howard Hampton from Kenora–Rainy River and the member from Timmins–James Bay remind this

House on a regular basis of impoverished police forces who struggle with broken tools or no tools. Surely there can't be anything more discouraging to cops, police officers across this province, than to work hard, charge accused people with good offences and have them walk out of court, never mind with a slap on the wrist but, more apparently, with a pat on the head.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To respond to the Minister of Agriculture and Food, I was hoping we would hear from the minister today something which would address the real needs of farmers who are facing difficulty. We know, for example, that hog and cattle farmers are in crisis as the cost of feed and energy skyrocket. The family farmer continues to be driven off the land under the pretence of efficiency and progress. That's what I was hoping to hear, and we still need to hear from the McGuinty government as more and more farmers are forced to leave their farm activities.

EDUCATION WEEK

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to respond to the statement made by the Minister of Education. We say that any time Ontario students perform well, the results are to be applauded and credit must be given to the students, their parents and all the educators who contributed to the success. But many students, parents and educators share our concern that test scores have completely taken over as the only indicator of success that the government wants to talk about. In fact, I say that the government is obsessed with test scores. Just like the previous government, they're mesmerized by them. They're seduced by test scores.

1420

I want to tell you that it's ironic that the British, who started this test-scoring with a great deal of zeal, are now getting out of the business; and it's interesting that as they are getting out, we are getting in with a greater obsession than ever before. We do so spending a great deal of money on test scores. Why wouldn't we be focusing on so many other areas that we need to lend our attention to, such as ESL? English as a second language is a serious problem all over Ontario, particularly in Toronto and the GTA. We know there are more and more students coming from other countries who need ESL teachers, yet we have fewer ESL teachers than ever before.

"Why?" is the question. Why isn't the minister coming into this House saying, "This is how we're dealing with that problem"? Yet, over and over again, the minister comes into this House talking about test scores, how well we are doing on test scores, and very little on some of the other areas.

Talk about special education. How many kids are waiting in line to get identification, placement and review committees in place so that we can understand what the problems of these kids are and what we need to do about it? How many kids are languishing in a regular classroom, waiting for special ed? Thousands and thousands, as former minister Kennedy used to say, and now under this government we seem to have forgotten the needs of special-education kids.

How many physical education teachers did we have at one time that we no longer have? Sixty-five per cent of our classrooms have no physical education teachers. Is this not a concern, when parents worry about the health of their kids?

Is it not a worry that parents are raising $600 million out of their own pockets to contribute to the regular classroom because we're not getting the funding that we need? How come we don't talk about those issues?

These are issues that deserve our attention, including the fact that there are so many poor kids who come to our schools hungry. We're not talking about how that affects learning and what the government is doing in collaboration with other ministries to make sure that we serve the needs of all these kids. We are obsessed with test scores, and we're forcing our teachers to be obsessed with test scores, at the expense of so much else that is needed in the schools.

DAY OF MOURNING

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for a member of each party to speak for up to five minutes regarding the day of mourning for workers killed and injured on the job.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I just want to begin by acknowledging today in the gallery, as you did, Mr. Speaker, our chair of the WSIB, Steve Mahoney, who joined me on the front lawns this morning. I thank him for being with us here today, and I thank him for his passion and leadership in working very hard, collectively with all of us, to reduce workplace injuries.

Today is the day we pause to honour and remember all workers who have been killed or injured on the job. Today is the day of mourning. It was first established by the Canadian Labour Congress 24 years ago and has been adopted by our federal government and some 80 nations around the world. The day of mourning was established to mark an important event for workers. It was on April 28, 1914, that this Legislature, the Ontario Legislature, passed the first Workers' Compensation Act.

Today is not only a day to remember and honour; it is a time for all of us to reaffirm our commitment to do whatever we can to prevent workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses. In 2008, 101 Ontarians lost their lives because of traumatic workplace injuries. Of those 101 fatalities, 10 were young workers, workers who were just starting out their careers. In 2006, more than 260,000 workers were injured on the job. Some were fortunate and returned to their jobs; others did not. For many, their injuries changed their lives forever.

It's not only the injured worker who is affected; workplace injuries also have a lasting impact on their families. These are people, not statistics. These are family, friends, colleagues—integral members of our communities. The human toll caused by workplace deaths, injuries and illnesses is immense. This is why governments must constantly strive to make strong advances in improving workplace health and safety.

Our government made a commitment to reduce workplace injuries by 20% between the years 2003 and 2008. We hired an additional 200 health and safety inspectors, we focused inspectors on workplaces with the worst health and safety records, and we worked and continue to work with our health and safety partners such as the WSIB and the safe workplace associations to instil a culture of prevention in all workplaces. That, indeed, is the key. Regulation and enforcement alone is not enough; we have to change society's mindset. Workplace injuries cannot be seen as just another cost of doing business; workplace injuries must become socially unacceptable and socially intolerable.

Already, students receive health and safety training in all grades. This is terrific. This will lead to new generations for whom working safely is simply a matter of course.

As we honour the dead and injured today, we must remember that all of us here in this House have a duty to advance workplace health and safety. We do this by passing laws that will go a long way to improving working conditions. We must also use our considerable influence in our communities to promote workplace health and safety. We all must be leaders in this area.

Earlier today, I had the opportunity to address a gathering on the front lawn of the Legislature. I reconfirmed our collective commitment to workplace health and safety. I pledged to do what we can to reduce even further workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses.

Shortly, we will observe a moment of silence for those who have died or been injured in the workplace. During that moment, we must pledge to ourselves that these deaths and injuries will never be forgotten. The best way we can honour those who have suffered is to do what we can to prevent tragedies. We owe it to them and we owe it to all the workers in this province.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I consider it an honour to have been asked to speak this afternoon on behalf of our caucus in remembering workers who have suffered serious injury in the workplace. Today in this House, we remember and acknowledge that these tragic occurrences exact a horrifying toll on workers, on their families, and, in a broader sense, on the social and economic fabric of our whole province.

This House remembers all of those who left their homes in the morning for what they anticipated would be nothing more than a routine day of work, and we express our sincere and heartfelt condolences to their friends, colleagues, families, and everyone else affected by the tragedies that have happened.

Today is also an opportunity for us to reaffirm our commitment to the prevention of illness and injury in the workplace and to express our renewed resolve to do everything possible to prevent further fatalities. As my colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo said in this House 17 years ago, "As we mourn the men and women who have died and been injured, each one of us should reflect on the work that has been done by our predecessors in the establishment of the workers' compensation system, the passage of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the other measures which this Legislature has taken over the years in an attempt to minimize the risk of death or injury to workers. However, although much has been done, there is much, much more that must be done in the future."

Those words ring as true today as they did in 1991. We know that it's important for us to remember, but we also know that it is incumbent upon us as legislators to always act in the best interests of Ontarians. Let this be our vision: an Ontario where every workplace is safe, where every worker is treated with fairness and dignity and where avoidable workplace accidents causing serious injury are no more.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mourn for the dead, fight for the living—now more than ever. New Democrats solidly join workers and their families across this province on this, the 24th anniversary of the National Day of Mourning, as we recall the broken bodies, the poisoned blood and the lost lives of working women and men in this province. And the devastation is far from over, because this year alone, yet another 378 Ontario workers were carried by pallbearers to 378 graves.

There were 333,938 compensation claims. Add to that probably approximately 6,000 more who don't fall into one of the statistical categories. New Democrats reject the proposition of "accident." See, an accident is—well, it's an accident. It's a bolt of lightning. It's something that can't be stopped, something that can't be prevented. There isn't one of us who has gone through a workers' comp file with one of our constituents and who doesn't understand in very short order—you learn, only a few pages into it—that any workplace death or injury is preventable.

We have, quite frankly, come here with more lip service. Oh, we can shed tears, we can express regret and we can talk about the unfairness of a working woman or man not being able to come home in the evening, at the end of their shift, as they were able to leave that home in the morning. It's not enough just to mourn; the command, the demand, on us is to fight for the living.

1430

We know that unionized workplaces are safer workplaces—end of story. That's a given. That's an absolute. It's not negotiable. It's not debatable. What that means is that every worker in this province, including agricultural workers, including part-time workers, has got to be given the right to belong to a union and to bargain issues—not just wages, but workplace health and safety, benefits, pension plans and job security. If we agree that every

worker in this province—and we certainly should—has a right to belong to a union, including agricultural workers, including part-time workers, then we have to also agree to the proposition that every worker in this province, not just some workers, has the right to join a trade union and form a collective bargaining unit with card-based certification. To deny that to any worker is to deny them the right to collectively bargain and the right to protect themselves and their well-being and their welfare in their workplaces.

We can't talk about safe workplaces without talking about the minimum wage. When workers have to work at two and three jobs to keep food on the table for their kids and try to house themselves, that means that workers are tired and workers are fatigued, and that means workers are exposing themselves to dangers that are truly preventable. So if we're really concerned about the welfare of workers, we should be committing ourselves to a minimum wage of $10 an hour now. I want to commend our colleague the member from Parkdale–High Park for her struggle in this regard.

Young workers are most at risk. It's not just enough to have the right to refuse unsafe work; young workers have to know what constitutes unsafe work and how they can exercise that refusal. It's too late for Aju Iroaga, the 25-year-old Nigerian-Canadian student who was working at tree planting to try to pay his way through McMaster University's engineering school.

We need harassment-free workplaces—free of sexual harassment, free of bullying, free of violence, free of racism—and our member from Hamilton Centre has presented and continues to present bills to this House to address that.

Every worker in this province has to have WSIB coverage. Huge and growing numbers of workers have no WSIB coverage whatsoever, yet they continue to be injured, maimed, poisoned and murdered in their workplaces. I want to commend our colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his work in that regard.

This is far more than lip service, it's far more than speech making; it's a simple matter of political will, and unless we muster that political will, more workers will be doomed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all members and our guests in the gallery to please rise for a moment of silence in respect for workers killed and injured on the job over the past year and in the past.

The House observed a moment's silence.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier, and it's regarding the state of Ontario's economy. Premier, there appears to be increasing evidence that Ontario is in a recession—what some would describe as a Dalton McGuinty recession. Last Thursday, a University of Ontario think tank confirmed that Ontario is in recession, unequivocally. It's quite a distinction to be the Premier of the only province in Canada currently in recession. Perhaps that explains your continuing to deny what is a growing consensus surrounding this issue. Premier, I ask you today: Are you going to deny the findings of yet another senior economist's report that the province is currently in a recession?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. I'll let others prognosticate, speculate and predict. I think what Ontarians want us to do—and Ontario families in particular—is to provide them with as much reassurance as we possibly can that they can count on us. They can count on us, first and foremost, to work together. Secondly, they can count on us to ensure that they have available to them at all times good-quality health care and education.

We will not undercut those things that Ontario families absolutely have to be able to count on. They can count on us to keep delivering on a plan that we've had in place for some time now. We will continue to invest in the skills and education of Ontarians. We will continue to invest in their infrastructure. That creates jobs in the short term just when we need them. We'll continue to support innovation so we can turn more ideas into good, high-paying jobs. As well, we'll continue to cut business taxes in an effective and affordable way.

We've got a great plan in place. It is suited to our times, it's in keeping with our aspirations, and we will continue to deliver on that plan.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There's an increasingly loud chorus of economists and financial institutions saying that the province is in a recession and your management is leading us to have-not status.

Ontarians are becoming increasingly concerned about the situation, but your sole response seems to be to put on a happy face and suggest that there's no better place to be in the dumpster than in Ontario. That was the essence of your Canadian Press interview last week.

Premier, when are you going to be up front with the people of Ontario and give them the real facts on the state of the economy and what you're going to do to address it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just don't believe we need to lecture Ontarians on the state of the economic challenge before us. I think it insults their intelligence to somehow presume that they don't understand the impact of the high Canadian dollar, the high cost of oil and a faltering US economy. I think they understand that that has a significant impact on how we're doing here in Ontario. So I won't go there; I'll let others do that. But what I will tell Ontarians is that we will continue to work together.

By way of an outside, independent perspective on this, the Economist Intelligence Unit, which is affiliated with the Economist magazine, recently ranked 82 countries and put Canada fourth. They cited us for our quality of infrastructure, market opportunities, moderate taxes and

lack of restrictions on trade. They said that where we are coming up short as a nation is in terms of our labour market development. That's what our skills-to-jobs program is all about. That's why, in our most recent budget, we committed $1.5 billion to further invest in the skills and education of our people. We're doing even what experts say we need to do.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: With the Premier, it's always someone else's fault. The reality is that it's fair to describe the current situation as Dalton McGuinty's recession.

Your decisions over the past four and a half years on tax relief, spending and regulatory growth have made a challenging situation much worse. At some point in the not-too-distant future, you will be unable to deny reality. You'll have to face the music and start to explain why schools are closing, hospitals are running deficits and people are losing their jobs.

Premier, why don't you start that process today? Show respect for Ontarians and give them the real facts on the state of the economy.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I'll let experts prognosticate, speculate and predict. I'll stay focused on what I believe Ontario families want me to focus on.

We've got a great and solid five-point plan that we'll continue to deliver on. It includes making investments in skills and education, innovation, infrastructure and the like.

What I think Ontarians need to understand is that what the Conservatives are proposing is that we reduce our revenues by $5 billion. That's their answer to an economic slowdown. Just when our revenues are being challenged, they would have us deprive ourselves of another $5 billion in revenues. What that translates into on the front lines for Ontario families is cuts to your schools, cuts to your health care and cuts to supports for the most vulnerable.

We're not going there. We are committing ourselves to making some difficult decisions, but always, first and foremost, we will bear in mind the needs of Ontario families.

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NATIVE LAND DISPUTES

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Again to the Premier, and it has to do with the situation we saw over the weekend in Deseronto and what we were seeing on the weekend and again today in Caledonia: the ongoing issue with what many construe as extortion with new development in the Brantford area.

Over the past two years, your government has made concession after concession to lawbreakers in Caledonia and beyond. You've failed and continue to fail to uphold the rule of law. Premier, do you accept any responsibility whatsoever for the growth of lawlessness that we're seeing across this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: As the member knows, the dispute that's taking place in Caledonia is a 180-year-old dispute between the federal government and Six Nations. The province of Ontario is participating in negotiations with the federal government. With respect to the claim in Deseronto, the province is not a party in the negotiations; it's a negotiation exclusively between the federal government and the First Nation. I would also say that we really must give a lot of credit to the Ontario Provincial Police, who over the weekend did keep the peace and did a great job and, as they said, will continue to put their priority of public safety first and foremost.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think the OPP is operating very well in the difficult circumstances that in many ways this government has placed them in. As Commissioner Fantino might say, you've made them the meat in the sandwich. You're negotiating with people illegally occupying land; you're treating what could be defined as extortion under the Criminal Code as ho-hum, even as it handicaps economic development in Brantford; you're ignoring illegal smoke shacks, even when they're operating on government land within metres of a school.

Minister, what kind of message do you think your laissez-faire approach is having on people inclined to break the law? Do you recognize that you're encouraging lawlessness?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I wouldn't want people watching at home or in this Legislature to imagine that Commissioner Fantino said what was attributed to him over the weekend. In fact, what he said, just to be clear, was, "Our priority is to maintain order and preserve the peace." As previously stated, he said that the priority was and continues to be the safety of the public and the reopening of the public highways.

With respect to Deseronto, he goes on to say that the roadways "were taken over by people who do not have the support of the Tyendinaga band council in relation to these roadblocks." Commissioner Fantino went on to talk about what he referred to as "misinformation" spreading through communities. Again, I want to say how much we all, in this Legislature, support the OPP and thank people in those communities for their patience.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: People who might be inclined to break the law simply have to watch question period or read a newspaper to know that this government is a soft touch when it comes to upholding the rule of law. When the official opposition raises concern about an illegal smoke shop operating on provincial government property, selling cigarettes to kids, your minister declines to answer. When developers in Brantford are confronted with demands for cash or face blockades of their developments, you tut-tut and do nothing about it. And we all know about Caledonia, where you continue to negotiate with people illegally occupying what is now government property.

Again, Minister, do you recognize the damage you are doing, the messages you are sending out and the encouragement you are providing to individuals inclined to break the law? Do you recognize what you're doing?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Nobody knows better than the police and the OPP that keeping the peace and upholding the law can be a very careful balancing act. The chief commissioner encouraged that we attain a resolution quickly and peacefully. But I remind the member, as well, that the only one who has made an explicit call for a violation of the law is a member of his own caucus, the member for Lanark, who said in January 2006, "If you're doing the right thing and you're breaking the law, the law is wrong."

With all due respect to the leader of the official opposition, I think it's very important that we recognize that this is a tense situation. The police are doing an excellent job, and we will continue to pursue the path of resolving this. At the end of the day, we have to find a resolution, and this is the path to a resolution.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. In November 2003, the Brock Smith report recommended that Ontario expand workers' compensation coverage to the 1.3 million workers who are currently excluded. Today, on the day of mourning for workers injured at work, 35% of Ontario workers are still not covered by workers' compensation.

Premier, after more than four and a half years as government, how does the McGuinty government justify this continuing injustice to 1.3 million Ontario workers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the leader of the third party for this question on this day. Let me just take this opportunity to thank members from his party, the party opposite, and from our party as well for joining me this morning on the front lawn at Queen's Park. It was a cold, rainy morning, but the front lawn was filled with Ontarians, people from right across this province, who have suffered from workplace injuries or who have lost family members to workplace injuries. It was a very moving ceremony and something that indeed inspires all of us here in this Legislature to do all we can to continue to reduce workplace injuries.

This is a matter that we have taken under consideration; it's a matter that has been under consideration for some time. We are taking a look in terms of the construction industry, for example, and that's something that we're going—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I didn't hear an answer. The fact of the matter is that the McGuinty government has had four and a half years to address this issue. Meanwhile, 1.3 million Ontario workers who work in private nursing homes, private schools, banks and insurance companies have no compensation coverage if they're injured on the job. Many of these workers, if and when they are injured, have to rely on food banks because they are not able to work, they have no income, and, what's more, they have no help from the McGuinty government. The Brock Smith report said four and a half years ago that they should be covered, but the McGuinty government refuses to act.

My question is this: Why is the McGuinty government continuing to hurt 1.3 million Ontario workers who do not have any workers' compensation coverage?

Hon. Brad Duguid: On a day like this, I hesitate to get political, but if any member knows about hurting the benefits of workers, it would be the member opposite, who was part of a government that began the cutbacks to workers through the Friedland formula, which reduced benefits to workers and made it impossible for them to keep up—a formula that was advanced by the opposition party.

We are indeed the government that in our previous budget brought a 2.5% increase to injured workers last July, 2.5% last January, and a further 2.5% coming forward this January. We're helping injured workers catch up from the mistakes made by the parties opposite.

With regard to the coverage for people outside of the current system, we are consulting right now. We're listening to those who know in the construction industry. It's a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: It is so interesting to hear the McGuinty government. They've been given a report in their first few months as government, a report that is very clear, and they hark back to something that may have happened 20 years ago as an excuse for their own inaction and their own lack of political will.

The time for excuses is over; the time for action is now. The issue is very clear. New Democrats believe it is simply wrong, unfair and unjust to leave 1.3 million workers in Ontario with no workplace insurance coverage. So my question is this: When is the McGuinty government going to stop treating those 1.3 million Ontario workers as second-class workers in the province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The WSIB has established the named-insured working group with the Ministry of Labour and construction stakeholders to try to help address this problem. It is an issue that we are consulting with the construction industry in particular on. But today is also the day to talk about some of the progress that's been made in terms of reducing workplace injuries. After all, that's what it's all about. It's making safer and healthier workplaces across this province.

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Four years ago a previous minister, Minister Bentley, set a very dramatic goal of reducing workplace injuries across this province by 20%. I'm pleased to be able to say today that we're well on the way to reaching that goal. A lot of it has been in consultation with the partners in the workplace health and safety industry as well as the 200 additional health and safety inspectors that this government has put in place. Our priority is to make workplaces across this province healthier and safer. We're making progress in that area.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: It's interesting that the Minister of Labour mentioned this last bit about reduced numbers of workplace accidents. We all know that that is part of the experience rating system. So I ask the Premier this: Your government is studying that problem to death, again. For many years, New Democrats and the labour movement have called for an end to these perverse incentives employers receive under the WSIB experience rating program. The McGuinty government simply refuses to act and says they're studying it.

Tell me: Why, after so many have identified this as a perverse system, including the Toronto Star, does the McGuinty government continue with this perverse system in terms of the workers' compensation system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again to the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the leader for the question. Indeed, this is an issue we have discussed before in this Legislature. The Premier, myself and this government believe that the current experience rating system is in need of being fixed. That's precisely why, in discussions with the chair of the WSIB, who's here today, we encourage that that take place. The chair was already well on his way to conducting a review of that system.

But what's important here, as I've said before, is the bottom line: trying to reduce workplace injuries. This government will do whatever it takes to bring down workplace injuries. We have made dramatic gains so far. A 20% reduction in four years is dramatic. But we're not satisfied. We believe there's more work to do and we will do whatever it takes to bring down workplace injuries across this province.

Mr. Howard Hampton: What's happening is that there is an underreporting of workplace injuries. That is one of the perverse outcomes of the experience rating program. The companies get money if they find ways of saying to workers, "Don't report this injury. Just keep on coming to work. We'll give you a chair in the backroom somewhere." It is a very perverse system.

If the system were really working, we wouldn't see the number of deaths in the workplace continuing to stay at 300 a year or above. It's not working, and you've received recommendation after recommendation to get rid of the experience rating system. Tell us: What's the McGuinty government's excuse for continuing a perverse system where a worker can be killed on the job, the company is fined by the Ministry of Labour for their negligence, and the company then gets $2 million from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board after the worker is killed?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I guess it's the nature of this place that the Leader of the Opposition wants to dredge up issues that were talked about a month or so ago. I think the Leader of the Opposition knows full well that this matter is under review by the WSIB and that we indeed have said that we think this incentive program should be improved. That's why we have confidence in the chair of the WSIB that they will come forward with an incentive program that will work in conjunction with our enforcement efforts, which have been working very well in conjunction with our efforts to prevent workplace injuries through education and awareness, which are having a big impact across this province. That's why I can stand in this place and say that we've reduced workplace injuries by 20% over the last four years, and we're going to keep going.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Through all of this, the McGuinty government wants to pretend that it somehow has no control over programs and systems that are implemented at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. In fact, the McGuinty government has the authority to say here now—today—that compensation coverage will be extended to cover those 1.3 million workers—many of them women, many of them new Canadians—who are left high and dry if they're ever injured on the job. The fact is that the McGuinty government has the authority here and now to direct the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to get rid of the perverse experience rating system.

So tell all those injured workers, many of whom are suffering and who are destitute, why, after four and a half years, the McGuinty government has failed to act on such obvious injustices.

Hon. Brad Duguid: To the best of my knowledge, the experience rating system came in originally under the NDP, so I can understand why they now might be a little bit nervous about the concerns that are being raised. We came to office to fix some of the problems that existed.

We've recognized that there are problems with this incentive program. That's why we're putting a lot of effort into working with the WSIB, which is responsible for this matter as a third party agency of this government, to resolve this issue and ensure that this incentive program is repaired. As well, a moratorium has been placed on rebates for companies where there's been a death on the job.

We are making progress. That 20% reduction isn't just a statistic; it's 50,000 workers who have not had to suffer from a workplace injury. Think about that: 50,000 families that have not got to go through what many families on the front lawn of this Legislature were here to mourn this morning. I think that's progress, but I suggest that we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MUNICIPAL POLICE SERVICES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Premier. The escalation of native protests at the development sites in Brantford is bankrupting Brantford Police Service. The police are required to keep the peace of the sites 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with no assistance from the OPP. As we know, the OPP are tied up with hundreds of officers dealing with the situations in Caledonia and Deseronto.

Premier, what financial assistance are you going to provide to Brantford Chief of Police Derek McElveny and his police service to address this very serious funding deficit?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I thank the member for his question. This has been an issue that I know MPP David Levac has been raising on behalf of his community, and I appreciate that the member has raised it as well.

These are discussions that are taking place not only through the local member, but I'm in fairly regular contact with the mayor and members of council as well as some of the developers to try and find ways in which we can resolve this in a peaceful way.

The member raises an issue specifically with respect to police budgets, which is partly a matter for the municipality itself to address. I understand that there will be discussions, inevitably, with the provincial government under these circumstances. But I want to assure the member that we're certainly very much aware of the circumstances and we want to continue to work with council, and in particular the local police force.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I hope that means sending them a cheque before long.

The situation in Brantford is a preview of what probably will await every other municipal police service that will have to deal with native protests, which are sure to elevate because of this government's tolerance of lawlessness. There simply aren't the financial resources in these municipalities to fund the policing of long-term, drawn-out occupations and blockades.

What assurances can this government provide to municipal police services that they won't suffer the same fate as the city of Brantford and their police service?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I just want to clarify that, as the member said, there are some municipalities that have a local police force and in some cases, such as Deseronto, the Ontario Provincial Police are the local police.

I think the member is using some language that would suggest an escalation. But certainly this government is doing everything we can to de-escalate. It's very important for people, as Commissioner Fantino said over the weekend, to understand what the facts are, to understand in particular that, for example, in Deseronto the protesters did not have the support of the Tyendinaga band council and the chief there, just as it was very important for Six Nations leaders to understand that today, in fact, there is nobody present at the Deseronto site any longer. We'll continue to provide those factual updates.

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COURT RULING

Mr. Peter Kormos: A question of the Attorney General: What kind of message is the McGuinty government sending when a guilty accused can walk away from handgun charges without even a conviction?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: When cases come before the courts, they're adjudicated by an independent officer of the administration of justice. Submissions are made by council and decisions are made. Those decisions should always be made on the basis of the facts and the law, without regard to who the particular individual is, and without regard to what their background is.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Last week, John Snobelen was found guilty of possession of an illegal handgun and careless storage of that handgun, a Colt pistol. He was given an absolute discharge. That's not even a slap on the wrist; that's a pat on the head. Why hasn't the Attorney General announced his intention to appeal this sentence?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As I said, these cases come before a court, which has the duty to assess the facts and the law independently, and it did. But for the accused's background, the member would not be asking the question. The issue is that we respect the independence and the assessment of the trial judge. The case is dealt with in an independent fashion, regardless of the status he might once have had in this or any other place. Everyone is entitled to justice according to the facts and the law.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Today we commemorate across Canada those workers who have been injured, killed, or have suffered illnesses as a result of occupational accidents and hazards. Although statistics show that there is much more work to be done, we have come a long way from the 1950s and 1960s, when dangers on the job were much greater. Many still recall, for example, the Hogg's Hollow tragedy, when on March 18, 1960, five immigrant Italian construction workers died in Toronto building a six-foot tunnel that had to be driven under a river. Their deaths, combined with a strike by mostly Italian-Canadian construction workers, led to a major overhaul in Ontario's occupational health and safety laws.

Could the minister please illustrate the major improvements that have been made since then?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member and, as I said earlier, all the members in this Legislature who joined me on the front lawn this morning in commemoration of the day of mourning. On a cool and rainy day, there were thousands of people on the front lawn, joining with us all in signifying how important this issue is to each and every one of us.

I'll be happy to answer the member's question, but there's something that I'd like to share with the House that happened at that particular ceremony. It was a speech made by Johanna Fisher. Johanna's 22-year-old son was killed on a work site a couple of years ago. This brave, courageous lady gave a wonderful address to the audience this morning, and it's something that I think touched each and every one of us. So let me, through this Legislature today, pass along my condolences to Johanna and all the people from across this province who have lost a loved one.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: On this date, numerous events are organized by labour organizations across Canada and in over 100 other countries to express remembrance for the families, friends and colleagues of those who have suffered or lost their lives while they were performing their jobs.

This serves also to remind us that there is more work to be done in the area of occupational health and safety. According to statistics, three workers die every day in Canada due to work-related injuries; 12 Canadian workers die from occupational disease every day as well.

Could the minister tell the House what steps are being taken by the ministry to improve and promote health and safety in the workplace?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Through the WSIB awareness programs and indeed through our enforcement programs and a number of other initiatives being taken, we're working very hard to try to bring down workplace injuries. As I said earlier, over the last four years we have made a dramatic decrease of about 20%, which was the goal that we had set about four years ago. That's a statistic, but we're talking about real people here. That would add up to about 50,000 people who have not suffered a workplace injury, 50,000 families who have not had a loved one injured. The families get impacted very much, as well, when these workplace injuries occur. When we talk about dollars and impact on the economy through these initiatives, that's about a $5-billion savings to the economy. It's something that this government takes some pride in. At the same time, we recognize we still have more work to do, and we're determined to bring down workplace injuries even further.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, this Legislature came together in a spirit of all-party co-operation. We came here on a Sunday, working together to pass legislation in the public interest. Why is the Premier unwilling to extend that same degree of co-operation to ensure that the daily time for question period is also in the public interest?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I say to the member that we have been debating this resolution and will continue to debate this resolution, the changes to the standing orders.

What we have proposed is that, in the event that the resolution passes, all three parties review how the rules are working, and if changes need to be made, including undoing the changes that we're proposing, then that's exactly what the committee is going to review and that's exactly what the government will look to.

Yes, it's a new way of doing business, and yes, we are going to try to attain the kind of co-operation one would like to have with these changes, and we'll continue to do so as we debate this resolution and over the course of the summer, in the event the resolution passes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The government House leader puts the cart before the horse. The legislative review should take place before the changes take place, not after.

His answer completely disregards the advice of one of our foremost academic experts on the Ontario Legislative Assembly, Dr. Graham White. At a news conference last Thursday, which I attended, he said that the proposed changes "would seriously detract from parliamentary democracy." Dr. White said, "I am firmly of the view that moving question period into the morning represents an entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the assembly in performing one of its key functions: holding the government to account."

My question is this: Why won't the government House leader inform the House that he will support our amendment to have question period begin at 1 p.m. every day, or does he think he knows better than Dr. White?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Au contraire. But there are some other electoral experts in this chamber as well who have been elected, including the member himself, on several occasions, and at the end of the day, the members will debate the merits of the resolution.

I did not for a second mean to suggest that the debate of this matter should take place after. There's no question that the important debate that takes place is beforehand.

I say to the member: It would also be a mistake to imagine that there is unanimity among the commentary that is attached to these proposals. You have positive opinions and editorials that have been put forward by the Toronto Star, the Hamilton Spectator, the Sudbury Star and a number of other opinion leaders. But at the end of the day, this is something for the House to decide. Debate will take place, and the members will have an opportunity to vote on it.

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ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: A question to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines: The Matawa First Nations tribal council chiefs released a statement on Friday, and I quote from it: "As First Nation chiefs, we are disappointed by the inaction of the government of Ontario to consult with and accommodate us about the mining claims that Platinex has staked in our territory."

My question is this: Why did the McGuinty government fail to consult and accommodate Webequie, Eabametoong, Neskantaga, Gull Bay and Marten Falls First Nations before allowing Platinex's claim to an additional 72,000 acres of crown land to be recorded?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to inform the House of the very positive working relationship that our ministry and government have with Matawa First Nation. The fact is that I met with Matawa First Nation very soon after being appointed Minister of Northern Development and Mines, and we were discussing my ministry's transitional approach to aboriginal engagement. This approach was developed based on what we heard through our engagement process with Matawa and other First Nations, and we've made real progress in that regard. Also, as the leader of the third party may know, at the recent prospectors and developers' associations convention in To-

ronto, Matawa was the first aboriginal organization from Ontario to be an active participant in attracting exploration activities. So we are working directly with Matawa First Nation now in terms of the claims that are out there and continuing our engagement process, and we look forward to continuing that discussion with them.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm still waiting for the answer. Yes, I know and many of us know that Matawa tribal council has no philosophical opposition to mining. But as they say in their statement, "We need to be consulted before these claims are accepted or recorded by Ontario," and that "the Ontario government has lagged considerably behind jurisprudence on aboriginal and treaty rights."

We already know that the leadership of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation is in jail because the McGuinty government failed to consult and accommodate that First Nation before recording mining claims.

My question is this: After several decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada, why does the McGuinty government continue to ignore its constitutional responsibility to consult and accommodate First Nations before you record—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: We take our duty to consult very seriously. It was confirmed in the court case by Justice Smith, but in terms of the Matawa First Nation, my ministry was in touch with them last week. We are in the process of contacting the individual First Nations that are impacted by the claims that Platinex brought forward and were recorded just this week, and as soon as claims are recorded, we're making sure they're aware of them. We also contacted Platinex last week, urging them to begin the dialogue immediately, and I'll be following up with the company myself in writing early next week. Certainly I'm disappointed that Platinex did not contact them in advance, but we are encouraging all companies to do this.

In terms of our transitional approach, we are providing aboriginal communities with quarterly maps, which will show mining claims in the general vicinity of their communities, and we shared that information with Matawa First Nation back in December when I met with them. Again, I'm very pleased with the relationship that we have with Matawa First Nation and many other First Nations in northern Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. David Orazietti: My question is for the Minister of Education. I want to take a moment and thank the minister for her support on educational issues in my riding. As a former teacher, I'm certainly aware of the issues surrounding education funding, and I know that we've made considerable progress in re-investing in our students. Despite a projected decline in enrolment of 90,000 students between 2003 and 2009, funding has already increased on a per pupil basis by more than $2,150 per student. That's a 33% increase since we took office. We've also taken the unique challenges facing northern and rural boards into account. Despite a decline in enrolment of 17% over the last five years, funding has increased by over $3,000 per pupil, or 37% over the last five years. Increased funding has reinforced our education strategy, which has produced stability, higher graduation rates and higher test scores.

Despite these facts, members from the opposition continue to say that we are not doing enough to support funding for student education. Minister, what steps are you taking to ensure that our education funding formula meets the needs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Education?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Whenever we talk about the way funding flows to our schools and to our boards—and that's really what the funding formula is—we have to link that to student achievement. We have to make sure that the way the money goes into the system is connected to improved student achievement. I think the results today, looking at national tests, demonstrate that what we're doing in education, including the way we've changed the funding formula, is improving student achievement. We do have kids doing better on test scores both in Ontario and on these national tests, and we have more kids graduating from high school. All of those things together indicate that the system is doing better.

The fact is, we've consulted with our partners every year and we've changed the funding formula to increase the funding for teachers—9,600 more teachers, 8,000 more support workers. We've included new funding for rural and northern boards, and by 2010 we've said we'll do a cumulative review or evaluation of all of the changes that have been made to the funding.

Mr. David Orazietti: As members on both sides of the House know, declining enrolment is a problem that affects provinces all across Canada. In Alberta, 40% of schools cite it as a significant challenge for the future; British Columbia is expecting 72,500 fewer students between 2001 and 2012. In fact, Statistics Canada states that only the Northwest Territories can expect growth in the zero-to-29-years-of-age bracket between 2006 and 2031.

School board administrators in Sault Ste. Marie recognize and appreciate the progress we have made despite the difficult circumstances we've been faced with. Mario Turco, the director of education for the Algoma District School Board, said after receiving the 2008-09 grants for student needs, "We are pleased that even with declining enrolment, our board's allocation for operating purposes is up ... and specifically provided for the safe school initiative and program enhancements, as well as student transportation. This is an issue my community will deal with for the foreseeable future." Minister, what changes have been made to the funding formula to help ridings experiencing declining enrolment?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On top of investing in things like the new grant for First Nations, Inuit and

Metis students and investing in more funding for English as a second language, we've made some very specific changes to the funding formula to address the fact that there are always residual costs that a board has, even when enrolment is declining. So things like the school foundation grant, which took $1.23 billion to ensure that schools have support for administration and secretarial support; the supported schools allocation provides for isolated schools to have extra staffing in order to be able to provide the programming that kids need; the grants for transportation and high-needs students have not been attached to declining enrolment, because we recognize that boards still have those costs. We've been very cognizant of those costs that boards have in the face of declining enrolment. We are setting up a declining enrolment task force, because we know that across the province we need to have this conversation about how to plan for the kids who are in the system.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. In order to protect severely abused children from being found by their parent abusers, the children's aid society often changes the name of a child who isn't lucky enough to be adopted but lives in a foster home. The name would never be revealed by the CAS to the abusing parents, nor would control of that identity be in the hands of the child when they reach the age of majority. Why, under your adoption disclosure legislation, should these same kinds of abusers be entitled as a matter of right to find out the name of the victim-child if he or she happened to be adopted? Why is it different in one case than the other?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This legislation is under the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The member opposite has a very good question, but I have to remind him that we're not talking about children here; we're talking about people who are 19 years old and over. If this legislation is passed, the birth parent or the adopted adult can still register a no-contact notice or a notice of contact preference.

What the member of the opposite party is asking for was rejected by all the provinces in Canada that have an open adoption act.

1520

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I can't believe that this minister and the other minister will not stand up for kids who are severely disadvantaged, who have psychological problems and often have an age much younger than their chronological age because of their emotional problems. These are victims of crimes, and you don't want to give them the same rights of protection from their abusers that other people in society have. I don't understand that. You argue that other provinces haven't included this. So what? If we identify this, as we did in Bill 183 in 2005 under your legislation, why was it good then but it's not good now? Why do you want to take away the protection that you had in place in 2005 but you don't have in this legislation?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, this provision that we have in this legislation has been in place not only in Canada but in other parts of the world. In the United States, for instance, a lot of the states have this no-contact provision in the act. They also have it in England, New Zealand and Australia—in New South Wales. Nowhere here in Canada, that I'm aware, has this clause been violated.

We have a serious fine. For example, Alberta has no fine in their legislation, but BC and Newfoundland have fines. We have a stiffer fine; it's a $50,000 fine. Elsewhere, it was never violated, so we are moving forward to open adoption.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and government House leader. You'll know that yet again there's been another tragedy on James Bay. We're yet again having to evacuate—this time, two communities: Kashechewan and Fort Albany. I heard this morning that we're now starting stage one evacuation in Attawapiskat. The hospital is being evacuated. Again it's a disruption of lives of people, and again millions of dollars have to be spent to move people.

My question is a simple one: Will you as government House leader and as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs agree to a standing committee that will have time, sometime this spring or this summer, to sit down and talk to experts about what can be done in order to minimize these types of effects on the people of James Bay and give the people of James Bay a chance to have their say?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I want to thank the member for his question. He raises a very compelling proposal which we haven't had a chance to discuss with the House leaders, but I just want to say that we do have to find some solutions.

I was speaking with members of that community over the course of the weekend. The member knows very well that it's extremely difficult when we have circumstances where people are so integrally tied up and proud and defensive of their territory and their land, in particular the First Nations that the member is making reference to, yet at the same time we have safety concerns.

We'll commit to the member to pursue this in House leaders' meetings. If the member has further questions on the specifics of what is happening there, I may need to refer it to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Pat Hoy: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. My riding is made up of two municipalities, and they know that I take my relationship with them very seriously. While I'm here at Queen's Park, the mayors have an opportunity to listen to

the citizens of my riding and keep me informed on how decisions we make here are affecting them in their hometowns. I want to thank Mayor Adams and Mayor Hope for the work they do managing the municipalities of Leamington and Chatham-Kent.

I often hear that there is much more to do, but that always goes along with an acknowledgement that this government has turned the ship around when it comes to supporting municipalities. Minister, what does this government intend to do to ensure that our municipalities get even more support in the future?

Hon. Jim Watson: I want to thank the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. I'm very proud of the relationship that the McGuinty government has delivered when it comes to improving relations between the municipal sector and the province of Ontario. In 2003, funding to municipalities was estimated at approximately $1.1 billion. That will climb to $2.8 billion by 2011. That includes a number of aspects in the last budget—Minister Duncan's budget—including $1 billion in support for infrastructure, $400 million of that for municipal roads and bridges.

Premier McGuinty, at the ROMA conference that many members of the House attended—and I know my colleagues the municipal leaders were there from Leamington and Chatham-Kent—announced an additional $150 million on top of the $300 million for the MIII program.

We have much more to do; that's why the Premier set up the fiscal and service delivery review. We are aiming to have our consensus report delivered by June.

Mr. Pat Hoy: The municipalities in my riding are still reeling from the downloading of the previous government. They're asking for programs that will attract businesses to our communities so that we can share in the overall wealth of Ontario and create sustainable employment opportunities for generations to come.

On Friday, I was pleased to announce $218,000 as part of the rural economic development program to support the renovation of the arts centre in Leamington. The renovated arts centre will help to revitalize the area and create an enhanced distinction for the uptown core in Leamington. The project will also create new employment opportunities and sales for local businesses in Leamington.

Minister, what programs does your ministry have available to support municipalities in rural Ontario to increase their economic competitiveness and create new jobs?

Hon. Jim Watson: I refer this to the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Indeed, our government recognizes the importance and the value of investing in our rural communities. Since 2003, I'm very happy to say that our government has, through the rural economic development program, provided $51 million in project applications. That $51 million has returned ten-fold, with almost $500 million in economic activity. That is why our government has increased our commitment to the rural economic development program over the next four years by $30 million.

Another very important thing that we have also recognized is the value of investing in broadband, so in 2007 we provided $10 million to rural communities. Over the next four years, our government will be investing an additional $30 million to build broadband infrastructure in rural communities.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Acting Premier. Acting Premier, within the start of question period, we've just been notified that General Motors has announced a shutdown of another line. We've got another 1,000 individuals going to be laid off as of September 8 in the auto sector. This is only at General Motors; the spinoff will be announced after that. The CAW is going to be hit very strongly, as will all the workers, who could be thousands and thousands of individuals in the region of Durham.

Acting Premier, what are you doing in order to support and to make sure that the auto sector is as strong as it was in the past in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I am very pleased to accept this question. It is always very difficult when we realize that we too are suffering the effects of a strong slowdown in the United States. We were speaking with General Motors today, and my office was in touch with Buzz Hargrove, the president of the CAW, as well.

What is difficult to see is that, all over North America, they are slowing down and removing a shift. There are three such facilities in the US that will be losing a shift. They will be losing theirs in July. Ontario's, however, out of Oshawa, won't be affected until September. So there is some level of good news there by comparison.

I will tell you, though, that this member in particular, from Oshawa, knows better than most members in the House, who don't have the benefit of a plant in their own backyard, the necessity of having an automotive policy so that when there are investments to be had, those investments land in Ontario.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: We know the details of the job losses at the three plants that are there, but what we haven't heard is a plan or something to come forward to assist the auto sector. It's the largest employer in the province of Ontario. It's extremely important that we come forward with a plan that'll give initiatives to make sure that we build a stronger economy. It all comes down to the economy.

What are you specifically going to do to aid the auto sector to ensure that we've got jobs in the future, not just at General Motors but as well at the feeder plants, which are going to lose thousands of individuals as well?

1530

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do appreciate this question, in particular coming from the official opposition. We

have been asking you for support for every single step along the auto supply chain all the way along. This past week, we introduced support for the auto parts makers as well as tool, die and mould makers. These are all elements that are a function of this past budget. I ask the member opposite: Where were you when it came to voting on a budget that specifically identifies not just the assembler but the parts supplier and the tool-die sector, which are all affected by the changes and challenges in the automotive industry?

That was a government that never put forward more support to this sector than this government has in these last five years. It is members of the opposition party whom we expect to have as supporters on these matters. When this budget is finally here for that final and third reading, I especially will be watching the member for Oshawa to see how he votes.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Why has the McGuinty government starved children's mental health services in Hamilton and across this province, creating long waiting lists, service interruptions, too few qualified staff and a serious erosion of the system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: That is certainly not how I would characterize our commitment to children's mental health. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that all children and youth in this province get the supports they need to reach their potential, and that includes children with mental health challenges.

We have released a document called A Shared Responsibility. It is a document that has received tremendous support across the province because, for the first time, the government took a step back and said, "What do we need to do to make sure that every child in the province has the support they need?" We are engaged now in a mapping process where we are taking stock of all of the mental health services for children in the province so the investments we make will have the greatest impact.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister knows that the sector doesn't believe that an analysis of who's doing what is going to actually fund the system. Funding for the children's mental health sector has been frozen since 1996, and we all know it, except for a small, little increase that hasn't made a hill of beans of difference.

In Hamilton we have Lynwood Hall child and adolescent services, Charlton Hall, Woodview and the Community Adolescent Network—all beleaguered as they struggle to meet demand and retain sufficient numbers of qualified staff. When is this government going to bring much-needed new and adequate funding to the children's mental health sector, not only in Hamilton but across this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Perhaps this is a good opportunity to talk about some of the investments we have made in the Hamilton area since we were elected: a 115% increase in kids receiving intensive autism therapy; 1,200 new affordable child care spaces created; 800 more children receiving mental health services than when we took office; 314 more kids being helped through our investments in the children's treatment centre at Hamilton Health Services; a 50% increase in funding to children's mental health agencies; $11.7 million of new funding to Hamilton's children's aid society since 2003; 92% of JK to grade 3 classes have 20 students or less; 248 new teachers since we took office; 175 kids found work through our summer jobs for youth program; and our youth outreach workers have made contact with—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Culture. Public libraries in this province are an essential service to support an educated and literate population. Libraries act as central gathering places and they form the foundation of public knowledge. Would the minister tell this House what this government is doing to support public libraries in Ontario?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I thank the honourable member for his question. Indeed, public libraries exist in all of our communities across this province, and they are often considered an essential service to support an educated and literate population. Libraries act as a central gathering place and they form the foundation of public knowledge.

I thank you for this opportunity to respond and will look forward to his supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended.

PETITIONS

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

"Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding

formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future."

I'm pleased to sign my name to that, and I give it to Bilaal to present to the table.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas part-time college workers in Ontario have been waiting for 30 years for bargaining rights; and

"Whereas thousands of part-time college workers have signed OPSEU cards, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board failed to order a timely representation vote; and

"Whereas the Ontario government must immediately make good on its promise to extend bargaining rights to college part-timers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The McGuinty government must immediately pass legislation legalizing the rights of college part-timers to organize, and direct the colleges to immediately recognize OPSEU as the bargaining agent for part-time college workers."

I agree with this. I sign it and send it to the table with page Dario.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have 14 petitions here today.

"Children and Smoke-Free Cars—Support Bill 11.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

"Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

"Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support 'legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present'; and

"Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico and South Australia recently joined several jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under."

I approve of this petition and will affix my signature to it and give it to page Cali.

ANTI-TOBACCO LEGISLATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: This is a petition I just picked up from Eckhardt's Shell on the way down here.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government recently passed the Smoke-Free Ontario Act; and

"Whereas the act prohibits sale and supply of tobacco to a person who is less than 19 years old; and

"Whereas the Tobacco Tax Act requires that a tobacco tax rate of 11.1 cents applies to every cigarette and on every gram or part gram of tobacco sold in Ontario;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that the two acts be enforced on all retailers in Ontario who sell, offer for sale or store tobacco."

I've also signed this.

DISABLED PERSONS
PARKING PERMIT PROGRAM

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there currently exist problems of exposure to theft and the weather when displaying a disabled person parking permit on a motorcycle while parked in a disabled parking space;

"We, the undersigned, petition our members of Parliament to promote the development of a special, fixed permit as proposed by the Bikers Rights Organization, for use by disabled persons who ride or are passengers on motorcycles, even if that requires an amendment to the Highway Traffic Act."

Hundreds of people have signed these petitions, and I proudly affix my signature.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have here a petition signed by a number of people. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas sections 48.9 and 48.10 of the Vital Statistics Act currently protect the privacy of adopted survivors of child abuse who were put up for adoption after being taken from severely abusive birth parents; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's Bill 12 will take away this protection and mandate the Registrar General to hand over the adopted identity of these victims to their abusive parents once the child turns 19; and

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"Whereas the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has said, 'The provincial government should not legally mandate the release of identifying information of victims of violence to the perpetrators of those violent acts'; and

"Whereas the Ontario Victims' Bill of Rights declares that victims should be treated with respect for their personal dignity and privacy; and

"Whereas these victims are often adopted in family groups, so that when one sibling reaches 19, there may be younger siblings who could also be affected by contact with the abusive birth parents; and

"Whereas no-contact notices have not been in existence in other provinces long enough to be truly tested;

"We, the undersigned, demand that the McGuinty government and the Ministry of Community and Social Services stand up for the safety and well-being of these severely abused individuals and reinstate a one-way disclosure veto to be filed by the children's aid society so that their abusive birth parents cannot find out the victim's adopted name without their permission."

I affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I've got a petition here from the people of Marlee village in my riding. It's in support of Bill 56, a bill to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending drivers' licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I sign the petition and fully support it.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I've affixed my signature as I am in complete agreement.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly sent to me by a number of individuals from Mississauga, Milton and Georgetown. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga-Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Adam to carry it for me.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: "Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition signed by concerned Ontario residents.

"Whereas sections 48.9 and 48.10 of the Vital Statistics Act currently protect the privacy of adopted survivors of child abuse who are put up for adoption after being taken from severely abusive birth parents; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's Bill 12 will take away this protection and mandate the Registrar General to hand over the adoptive identity of these victims to their abusive parents once the child turns 19; and

"Whereas the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has said, 'The provincial government should not legally mandate the release of identifying information of victims of violence to the perpetrators of those violent acts'; and

"Whereas the Ontario Victims' Bill of Rights declares that the victim should be treated with respect for their personal dignity and privacy; and

"Whereas these victims are often adopted in family groups, so that when one sibling reaches 19, there may be younger siblings who could also be affected by contact from the abusive birth parent; and

"Whereas no-contact notices have not been in existence in other provinces for long enough to be truly tested;

"We, the undersigned, demand that the McGuinty government and the Minister of Community and Social Services stand up for the safety and well-being of these severely abused individuals and reinstate a one-way disclosure veto to be filed by the children's aid society so that their abusive birth parents cannot find out the victim's adopted name without their permission."

I support this petition and I'm proud to sign it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to present a petition regarding Bill 56, to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles. This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I affix my signature to this. This is a very good bill from my colleague Mike Colle. I hand it over to Rafaël, our page.

HEALTH CARD RENEWAL CLINIC

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to present a petition about bringing health card renewal services closer to Glanbrook residents. This would help them get renewal closer to home, rather than going to downtown Hamilton.

In support, I affix my signature.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Norm Miller: I have received more petitions to do with preserving the Lord's Prayer.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 8, An Act to amend the Education Act / Projet de loi 8, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation.

Bill 16, An Act to amend Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000 / Projet de loi 16, Loi modifiant la Loi Christopher de 2000 sur le registre des délinquants sexuels.

Bill 66, An Act to resolve labour disputes between the Toronto Transit Commission and Local 113, Amalgamated Transit Union, Lodge 235, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, and Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 2 / Projet de loi 66, Loi visant à régler les conflits de travail entre la Commission de transport de Toronto et la section locale 113 du Syndicat uni du transport, la section locale 235 de l'Association internationale des machinistes et des travailleurs et travailleuses de l'aérospatiale et la section locale 2 du Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INVESTING IN ONTARIO ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 PERMETTANT D'INVESTIR DANS L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 14, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 35, Loi autorisant le ministre des Finances à faire des versements aux bénéficiaires admissibles sur les crédits affectés par la Législature et modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la transparence et la responsabilité financières, la Loi sur le ministère du Trésor et de l'Économie et la Loi de 1991 sur le Conseil du Trésor.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 22, 2008, I'm now required to put the question.

Mr. Gravelle has moved second reading of Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1553 to 1558.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those in favour will please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Orazietti, David
Albanese, Laura	Fonseca, Peter	Pendergast, Leeanna
Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Balkissoon, Bas	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldip	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Carroll, Aileen	Mangat, Amrit	Sorbara, Greg
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Savoline, Joyce
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Shurman, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Tabuns, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 59; the nays are 22.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): This bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

ACCESS TO ADOPTION RECORDS ACT (VITAL STATISTICS STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR L'ACCÈS AUX DOSSIERS D'ADOPTION (MODIFICATION DE LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES STATISTIQUES DE L'ÉTAT CIVIL)

Mrs. Meilleur moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 12, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act in relation to adoption information and to make consequential amendments to the Child and Family Services Act / Projet de loi 12, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil en ce qui a trait aux renseignements sur les adoptions et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Madame Meilleur has moved third reading of Bill 12. Madame Meilleur.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I would like to mention that I will share my time with my parliamentary assistant today.

Monsieur le Président, je prends la parole aujourd'hui afin d'inciter mes collègues de l'Assemblée à soutenir la proposition d'une nouvelle loi ontarienne relative à la divulgation de renseignements sur l'adoption.

But before I go any further, I would first like to welcome my guests in the members' gallery today. Please join me in welcoming Wendy Rowney of the Coalition for Open Adoption Records, or COAR; Monica Byrne from Parent Finders; and Karen Lynn from the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers, who is accompanied today by her son, Douglas. Welcome.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the staff from my ministry for helping me with this bill.

Our adoption information disclosure legislation is at the core of our government's plan to bring adoption information disclosure laws into the 21st century. This is a proposed bill that would make open adoption records a cornerstone of Ontario's adoption laws. It would usher in a new era of progress for Ontario's adoption information disclosure system.

La Loi de 2007 sur l'accès aux dossiers d'adoption aurait des conséquences bénéfiques sur tous les dossiers d'adoption futures en Ontario.

La loi fera en sorte que nous atteindrons le juste équilibre entre les personnes adoptées et les parents de sang qui désirent connaître leur identité et leur histoire personnelle et celles qui désirent protéger leur vie privée.

This proposed legislation will give adult adoptees and birth parents access to information about their personal past, information that has been denied to so many for so long. If passed, this legislation will allow access to information such that adult adoptees could learn where they were born, their original name at birth, and the names of their birth parents. Birth parents could learn about the child they placed for adoption, including their new name and where the adoption took place.

At the same time, our proposed legislation would safeguard the privacy of those involved in past adoptions.

Les personnes dont l'ordonnance d'adoption a été rendue en Ontario avant le 1er septembre 2008 auront le choix d'enregistrer dans leur dossier un véto sur la divulgation d'informations identificatoires. De plus, tous les adultes adoptés et les parents de sang peuvent enregistrer un avis de non-communication ou un avis de mode préféré de communication.

This proposed legislation respects the September 2007 decision of the Superior Court of Justice and the views of Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner. Most importantly, it respects the thousands of Ontario adoptees and birth parents who have pushed for changes in our adoption disclosure laws. This legislation also brings us in line with states like Alabama, Maine and Delaware, to name a few, which have had open adoptions since 1996, and countries like England and Wales, New Zealand, and several states in Australia, which have all opened their records.

We have listened to the people that this bill affects the most: our stakeholders. And with the support of COAR, Parent Finders, Bastard Nation and the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers, we are proud to add our province to the list of jurisdictions that have modernized their adoption disclosure laws.

The proposed legislation does not include a determination-of-abuse process. We have discussed this issue with our stakeholders, and their advice was that we should treat adopted adults like adults and not like children. The intent of the proposed legislation is to open adoption records for adults, not children. When asked about this issue, COAR had this to say: "The Coalition for Open Adoption Records supports Bill 12. No-contact notices work. They protect adopted adults and birth parents from unwanted contact. Every country in the world that has used one has found it to be an effective deterrent against unwanted contact."

The Information and Privacy Commissioner also states that she is "fully supportive" of Bill 12 as it is currently written. That is because all adopted adults can still submit a no-contact notice or a notice of contact preference under the proposed legislation. There is a fine of up to $50,000 for an individual who breaches a no-contact notice.

Parent Finders recently said that this no-contact notice is stronger than any no-contact notice in any other province, and that the no-contact notice provision gives more than sufficient protection.

No province that has introduced legislation to open adoption records has included protective measures in addition to no-contact notices. British Columbia, Alberta and Newfoundland all report that the no-contact notices have been very successful solutions to any concerns regarding protective measures. In addition to the measures contained in the proposed legislation, there are other protective measures within the law that may be available should adult adoptees feel that they are at risk of harm.

Why the new legislation?

J'ignore le nombre de personnes dans cette salle qui ont vécu personnellement l'adoption ou qui connaissent quelqu'un qui a été touché par l'adoption. Si vous avez eu l'occasion de parler avec une personne adoptée ou le parent d'une personne adoptée, vous comprenez que de ne pas connaître son passé ou, encore, de ne pas savoir ce qui est advenu de son enfant est profondément troublant.

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If you have not been touched by adoption and if you don't know someone who has, just imagine this: Imagine not knowing about your biological parents or who they are. Imagine having a child years ago and then never knowing that child as he or she grew up, not even your child's name. Under today's adoption laws, this is everyday life for thousands of Ontario residents. We may not be able to fulfill all of their wishes to know about their past, but as legislators in this province, we can make progress for them.

I have heard a number of touching stories from stakeholders as we have worked on creating this bill. For example, one stakeholder was given up for adoption as a child. She was reunited with, first, her birth grandmother, and then her birth mother. She told me what a positive experience it was and how the experience changed her life. It gave her a better perspective on who she was, where she had come from and where she is going in the future. We want to give every adopted adult the opportunity to have a similar experience if they so choose. This legislation will give adoptees the ability to make that choice.

Notre gouvernement maintient depuis longtemps que les personnes concernées par l'adoption devraient avoir les mêmes droits que les personnes non adoptées de connaître leur identité et leur famille.

Adoptees have told us that knowing about their past would give them purpose and closure. They told us that when it comes to knowing their family history, they shouldn't be treated differently just because they were adopted. Birth parents told us that too often they had to give up their children due to family or other pressures. Many simply want to know if their child is alive and well. Child welfare experts have told us for years that adoptees want to know about their origins and birth parents want to know that their children are happy and healthy in their new families. It's time we listened.

Par contre, nous savons que ce ne sont pas toutes les personnes concernées par l'adoption qui voudront que les dossiers d'adoption soient accessibles. Nous savons que le droit à l'information n'est pas la même chose que le droit d'établir une relation. Voilà pourquoi la loi que nous proposons est flexible et respecte les choix des personnes concernées quant à l'information comme telle et comment on pourra y accéder.

Moving forward, Ontario has changed and we believe that it is time our adoption information disclosure laws changed too. Our proposed legislation has been tailored to meet the concerns of many interested parties. We have had to balance calls for complete openness in all adoption records against the concerns of those who would keep that information sealed forever.

Nous avons travaillé de près avec les membres de tous les partis de la Chambre ainsi qu'avec le Commissaire à l'information et à la protection de la vie privée de l'Ontario afin de respecter leurs désirs. Je crois que nous avons su relever le défi.

We believe it is in everyone's best interests to move quickly on this legislation. We can no longer deny access to basic personal information for those who seek it. I am confident that we will have the support of the Legislature as this bill proceeds through the House.

In closing, I thank my honourable colleagues for their support and their guidance, which have led to this landmark decision.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Madam Minister, honourable colleagues, it's my honour to rise in this House today to lend my support to Minister Meilleur and to this proposed legislation. Our government strongly believes that all Ontarians should be able to learn more about their own personal history. Our proposed legislation will, if passed, make open adoption records a cornerstone of Ontario's adoption laws.

Some people may be asking why, after 80 years of secrecy surrounding adoptions, we are proposing to open records. Frankly, it's because the sealing of adoption records is the legacy of a different age in Ontario. Ontario has changed. The day has passed when adoptions were conducted in secrecy. We have moved past the days when adoptions were kept a secret as the child grew up. That was a time when we had orphanages, insane asylums and homes for unwed mothers; that was a time when unwed mothers were told to give their child up for adoption because that is what the social norms and attitudes of the time dictated. One can only imagine the loss those young women must have felt at that moment. It was a loss they would carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Our society has changed a great deal in the last 80 years. Our society now rejects the code of silence once associated with adoption. We now realize that by denying adoptees and birth parents identifying information, such as their given names and surname, we are perpetuating the shroud of shame and secrecy.

Today we realize how important it is for a birth mother to know what happened to the child she gave up a long time ago. We know how important it is for adult adoptees to know about their personal history. These are the realities that our proposed legislation recognizes. It recognizes the struggle that many adopted adults and birth parents have waged for many years, a struggle to learn basic information about their own identity or that of their birth children, personal information that the rest of us simply take for granted. Adoptees want to know about their origins; birth parents want to know that their children are happy and healthy in their new families. Ontario has changed, and we believe it's time that our adoption information laws changed too.

We had the chance to debate this issue for several days and to listen to many people who came before us in com-

mittee. Also, many different speakers from both sides of this House spoke on this issue and outlined the importance of open records and allowing the adult adoptees and their birth parents to get reconnected, because it's important for them to learn about their history, to learn about their past.

As I mentioned in my introduction, Ontario has changed. The secrecy was a part of the past. Our duty as elected officials in this place is to respond to the people who came before us many different times, who sent us letters, who asked us on many different occasions to help them to reconnect, because it's important to them to know about their history, to know about their fathers and mothers, to know about their health history and to know about their identity. Our obligation as elected officials in this place is to listen in response and to act in a manner to give them the right to reconnect with their past.

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I know this bill came once in the past, and it came back again to this House. After full debate, I'm convinced it's the time to pass it. It's important to us to pass it because it's important to the people who asked us to do so.

I know many members of this House spoke and voiced their concerns. I believe our ministry and our government acted in a professional manner in order to provide all the answers. That's why the privacy commissioner came to lend us her support and spoke in support of this bill. It's important to all the people in this province, important to the people who've been denied the right to know their kids, important for the kids who don't know their parents, and it's our obligation to make it easy and accessible for them.

In the meantime, we know that some privacy has to be protected. We know that some people do not want to be reconnected with their past. We provide in this bill a mechanism to protect their identity if they don't want to reconnect with their past, if they don't want anyone to connect with them, and also put a penalty for people who violate these rules and regulations.

I think this bill strikes a balanced approach between the people who want open records and the people who want some kind of privacy and protections.

So our ministry, our government, is trying to provide a real approach, to provide a mechanism for the people who asked us to open those records, and also, in the meantime, to listen to the concerns of the people who don't want to be connected or contacted. As I mentioned, there is a penalty of almost $50,000 for individuals who violate those no-contact notices and also a penalty of more than $250,000 for stakeholders who violate those no-contact notices.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the ministry staff and the people who came before us and gave us their support and spoke openly about this matter.

I want to ask all the members of this House, from the government side and the opposition side and the third party side, to come together to pass this bill, because it's about time to act on behalf of the people and put some kind of closure to this issue.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I thank the minister and the parliamentary assistant for making comments.

I will tell you right up front that we look forward to the comments made by my colleague Mr. Sterling—and the fact that he has shown so much leadership on this issue because of his understanding of the bill.

I'm hoping as well that the recommendations that have been made to the governing party—I hope they're right this time, because it has been a bit of an embarrassment to the government to bring this back. They were warned earlier about some of the amendments that needed to be made, and of course they weren't done. So we look forward to making sure this is implemented properly.

I've only got a few seconds, but I was curious, and I hope some of the members opposite will draw it to our attention—the penalties that the bill imposes on those who break it; for example, the penalty up to $50,000. I hope someone can answer this, maybe in their rebuttal or in their comments a little later on, but I'm curious about what would happen to families that just didn't have $50,000. That's a concern that I have. I know there are other concerns that we still have with the bill, even as we speak. We're generally supportive of this legislation, but we really want to make sure this time, once it has been kind of an embarrassment to the government and they've had to bring it back, that we get this bill right. I look forward to all the debate at third reading.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the statements made today by my friend and colleague from London–Fanshawe and by the Minister of Community and Social Services. I listened to see what exactly they were describing in this bill. It appears to me, after having listened to both of them, that this was a déjà vu from more than a year ago when this bill was first introduced and debated in this Legislature, because throughout the whole quality of the debate and the things they had to say here today, there was no reference to the fact that the reason the bill is back here is because of a court ruling. There was no reference to Judge Belobaba's decision. There was no reference to the mistake that was made and that the privacy commissioner had talked to the Legislature about. There was this whole, can I say, ethereal discussion that took place in this Legislature more than a year ago. Of course, at that time there was much support for the bill; indeed, I believe there still is much support for the bill. But my colleagues from the Liberal Party seem bound and intent not to talk about the mistakes that were made by them, and the mistakes that continue to be made by them, in bringing this bill back here after committee.

The commissioner was in committee; the privacy commissioner came. She understood part of the motion that I was trying to make, and although she could not support it, she did talk about the need to work on another part of the bill. She was there to support the amendment made by Mr. Sterling from the Conservative Party in

committee. There was no mention at all about that when the two were up talking. It appears that they seem bound and intent to talk about only the positive aspects of the bill, of which there are many, but not to acknowledge the very grave mistakes that they have both made in the past and continue to make today.

Mr. Dave Levac: Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to support my colleagues, the minister and the parliamentary assistant, for this piece of legislation and their comments towards it. I also respect those of the opposition.

What I'd like to do is point out that, as a member who was on that committee, sat through the debate, heard the deputations and is aware of the history of this piece of legislation in many forms—the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills—I think that's the new name—is the dean of this place, along with Mr. Bradley, but is also very learned in this area. He has done a lot of work, and I compliment him for it. He, along with some people in the House, was very concerned about the type of legislation we were dealing with, and that did provide us with some cautions. Some of the suggestions and recommendations were accepted and others were not. Unfortunately, as the member from Beaches—Beaches or Beach?

Mr. Michael Prue: Beaches.

Mr. Dave Levac: —Beaches indicates to us, yes, there are mistakes. I'd like to point out that in the history of this place—let's try to find any government that didn't have some pieces of legislation sent back to be corrected. Quite frankly, it happens in this place, it happens in Ottawa and it happens in several places. When the Supreme Court works, when the Ontario Supreme Court works, when judges work, when other people look at pieces of legislation and challenge them, yes, there have been some mistakes and yes, they do get corrected. Hopefully, it's a fluid thing where we continue to get better, because the intent would be that this piece of legislation is simply that: a piece of legislation that starts that, and there will be other issues that need to get resolved and dealt with.

I do want to bring credit to somebody who hasn't been mentioned yet—I know she has been mentioned before, but not right now in this debate: Marilyn Churley, the former member from Toronto–Danforth, who championed this cause within her own personal life and gave us some examples, and to those deputants who came forward and explained to us their lives and put it on the line. We tried to deal with it. I think there are more things to do, and I look forward to making sure this legislation is the best it can be.

1630

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 12, on adoption disclosure. While I support the desire for adoptees to be able to access information about their birth parents and their family medical history, I am very disappointed that the section of your original bill that protected children of abuse has been removed from Bill 12. How unfortunate that the minister has refused to listen to the Ontario children's aid society and protect these children from being revictimized by their abusers.

I understand that the minister is in a hurry to pass Bill 12. After all, as the member from Beaches–East York points out, the only reason we're amending this adoption disclosure act is because the previous Liberal legislation was seriously flawed. In fact, your government was taken to court because you got it wrong the first time. Today, unfortunately, we are here again debating it, and I believe that once again you are getting it wrong. You are setting yourself up to revictimize people who have suffered abuse and were ultimately adopted, and now they're not going to be kept away from their abusers. How unfortunate that the minister has chosen to ignore the concerns raised by the PC caucus and the Ontario children's aid society.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to thank all the members who spoke and gave some comments on my brief and the minister's speech.

It's important for us in this House to listen to the people of Ontario, and it's very important to us to listen to all the stakeholders who came before us and voiced their concerns. That's why we came to this bill a second time and opened it, and also to listen to the privacy commissioner and the judge, and to respect the ruling on this issue.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we are elected to this place to make legislation and rules and laws that affect the daily lives of Ontarians. Sometimes we don't make a correct decision, sometimes the times change, and sometimes circumstances change. That's why we have to respond to those changes. That's why we came back a second time with reform and reconstruction of this bill. Hopefully, this time, the people of Ontario who asked us to change it, who asked us to make some kind of move, will be pleased and happy

As I mentioned in my speech, the privacy commissioner came before our committee and spoke. She supports the bill. She thought it was an important step to want open records. She was also happy and pleased about the protection mechanism, which was put in place in this bill. What I mean by that is the penalty: It's up to $50,000 for individuals and $250,000 for organizations or a stakeholder.

I think that in this bill we have reached a balanced approach in order to create a balanced mechanism so that all the people can know about their history and their past. At the same time, if they choose to have some kind of protection mechanism, this bill provides them with those mechanisms.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you again and thank all the people who spoke before me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I appreciate being called at this point in time. I would ask a page to get me another glass of water, because one of the Liberal backbenchers came over just before I was going to speak and spilled water right over my desk so I would be thrown off. I guess they'll do anything, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation, I hope, is drawing to a close so that we can have much more open access to birth records for both parents and adoptees as we go forward. It's been a long time. Actually, it wasn't necessary that it be this long. When we go back even to the time when Ms. Churley, whom we've talked about, was a cabinet minister in the Bob Rae government, that government didn't see fit at that point in time to bring forward an amendment to our adoption disclosure laws here in the province of Ontario.

I might add that the last time these laws were amended was way back in 1979. At that time, there was some opening up of the process, although it required both parties on both ends of the adoption—the adoptee and the natural mother—to take positive action and indicate to the registrar that they wanted to have disclosure. So it was difficult, and I think, as time has marched on, people have come to the point where we all admit that going forward—and in Bill 12, September 1, 2008, is the day, going forward, that the records will be opened for both sides, so that there will not be a block to many of the records.

As I understand it, there are about 500,000 to 600,000 records in Ontario at this time, so that would affect approximately twice, maybe two and a half times, as many people in the province. Going forward, after September 1, the records will be open for both sides to see, save and except when there has been a veto disclosure exercised by one side or the other. That will be able to be done by that person unilaterally. I might add: That is why the previous legislation failed. The previous legislation, which was passed in 2005—Bill 183—said that there was no opportunity for someone who had had a record before to keep the control of that private document within his or her grasp. This party and I said to the government that it was not fair to go back in time, when people understood or were told or there was a law or there was a regulation or there was a policy which kept those records private and sealed. There was no way that you could go back in time and open those records without giving the people who had been promised privacy the opportunity to at least veto that disclosure. I imagine that many people in the province will not hear about this debate, will not hear about Bill 12, will not know that in fact they can register a veto disclosure, but that's the way it's going to happen after September 1.

One of the issues I want to talk about is kids who had been severely abused and then came into the hands of the children's aid society and subsequently were adopted and assumed a new name. Oddly enough, under this legislation, those kids, when they reach the age of 19, will not have the opportunity to keep their identity secret from their abusive parents. Some of these abuse cases are sad, they're severe, and many of the people who were involved in them are, in my view, despicable. Notwithstanding that, we are at this point in time in the Legislature.

I want to also say to members of the Legislature that this kind of legislation should not be political, although I believe that the government is in some way being political, because they are paying so much attention to the pro-disclosure groups without enough regard for those people who cannot speak for themselves. The people who do not want these records disclosed are naturally reluctant to come forward.

When the Minister of Community and Social Services at that time, Ms. Pupatello, introduced the former Bill 183, she alluded in her opening remarks here in the Legislature, when she spoke on it in ministerial statements, to working with the privacy commissioner, Dr. Ann Cavoukian. In fact, all of us in the Legislature sort of looked at each other and said, "This is funny. It appears that Dr. Cavoukian is in favour of this legislation." I'm talking about Bill 183.

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That didn't turn out to be the case. In fact, Dr. Cavoukian was so aggrieved at how she implied that Dr. Cavoukian was in favour of this—because she was a privacy commissioner—that immediately, the next day, she issued a press release saying that she was against the original Bill 183. That was because of the retroactivity of breaking this privacy pact, if you want to call it—legislation, rules, policy—the understanding of people who had gone through the adoption process that the records were sealed. That was the understanding. Dr. Cavoukian later was supported by every other privacy commissioner in Canada, including the Canadian privacy commissioner, that Bill 183 was bad legislation. It violated our privacy rights.

We went through some rather extensive hearings on that bill: clause-by-clause, and we heard from a lot of groups as well. In the hearing we had several people come in front of us who were on the other side of the issue. They said they wanted control over the release of this very private information themselves and that a no-contact kind of protection was inadequate.

Incidentally, by happenstance, it wasn't really planned by the Attorney General. Someone had asked for the constitutional opinion on this bill and they mistakenly gave it to us. Normally the government doesn't give out constitutional opinions. The Attorney General is very careful about giving out constitutional opinions to anybody, including members of a committee or members of the Legislature. I understand as well, as a former Attorney General of the province, why that's the case. They're usually not black-and-white decisions. They're not decisions which say, "This is constitutional" or, "This isn't constitutional." But we did get the AG's opinion on this, or the AG staff's opinion on the constitutionality of it, and it was lukewarm. I would say that it was low to middle in terms of their opinion as to whether this would stand the test of court.

In the committee we had two people who came forward to us, Joy Cheskes and Denbigh Patton, who were both adoptees and brave enough to come in front of the committee. They came with a very noted counsel, lawyer Clayton Ruby. Clayton Ruby had looked into the matter, and he told the committee that he thought this bill was

unconstitutional and would not stand a test in court. He further told the committee that he had been instructed by Mr. Patton and Ms. Cheskes to go to court to test it. They did go to court and tested it, and of course the court threw it out.

I'm telling you that history because I think it's important for the Legislature to understand that if you try to run too fast and run around people's rights because one group wants an absolute right of disclosure but there is not much noise from the other group, you take a great risk. This registry could be opened today. It could have been opened in the fall of 2007. It could have had people obtaining disclosure information about their birth parents or their adopted children at this time. So we've lost a year because of the stubbornness of this government. Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, because I'm not sure whether the Premier—I don't think he said this in confidence. He walked into this Legislature one day and said, "Norm, you were right on this one." He told me I was right in my arguments on this legislation that I placed before this Legislature in 2005.

I ask the members, when they are considering closing down the debate and going ahead with this legislation, why would the government not be more open with regard to dealing with this very special small group of people who are so vulnerable? I feel so strongly for their rights because, when you talk about this group of people in our society, kids who have been severely abused during their childhood by parents—some of this is incest, rape, attempted murder, starvation; some really awful stuff, just awful stuff—these only represent about 1% of the kids who become wards of the crown, a very, very small number of children, but they don't have any political power. They will never have any political power. So I feel very much that I have to speak up and be strong in terms of carrying forward their issues in this legislation.

There was also some talk, even in this debate, about the privacy commissioner approving Bill 12 as it was, that it was a nice, clean package that the privacy commissioner approved and said was okay. Yes, I believe that Dr. Cavoukian has said that the legislation, as it stands, now satisfies her as the privacy commissioner of Ontario. But she hasn't said, and in fact probably wouldn't say—she has said to me that she doesn't have any objections to my amendments, because my amendments are not about taking privacy away from somebody; they're about giving more privacy to a select, small number of kids in Ontario, some of our most vulnerable kids of all.

We talked in the previous debate two or three years ago about this non-disclosure process, that people could file non-disclosure notices. I didn't practise a lot of criminal law, but I practised a little bit when I started way, way back in the—I'd better not talk about exactly when. Not in the 1960s; in the 1970s. You learned very early, when you were practising law or you were in the milieu of criminal law, that if somebody was bothering somebody—and it happened in family, in domestic, situations probably more than anything else—in order to protect your client, you might want to get a restraining order. I did a little bit of family law as well. What you found was that it was very difficult to get the police involved in giving evidence or laying a charge or being involved in domestic situations when there was some associated violence. So it was hard to get the police active on the file.

Secondly, it was a somewhat expensive process to go through. A restraining order sometimes was followed by the person it was against. If it was against a particular individual, sometimes they followed them and sometimes they didn't.

I guess the most notable, most recent example of that is a horrific homicide that we've had out in British Columbia, whereby the father, who is now charged with the murder of three children, had a restraining order against him. If you have a restraining order against you, they can throw you in jail if you break the restraining order, if you can get the police to act on it. But in this case, this individual is, or appears to be, from the news reports I've heard, mentally ill. In talking to children's aid workers, these parents who are perpetrators of violence against their children often have mental illness problems as well. There are drugs often used as well, unfortunately, and those things lead to this kind of horrific act that is involved.

1650

When you talk about no-contact orders—and I want to read clearly what the legislation says. It says that you're liable to a fine of not more than $50,000. Well, judges rarely, if ever, give the maximum fine. All we've heard from the minister is, "There's a $50,000 fine if you break the no-contact order."

Let me talk about the no-contact order, because we talked about it in the previous debate as well. You're talking about a family situation. Here's an abused child, let's say, of the age of 20, and his or her abusive father has got the adoptive name, been able to track him or her down, has contacted and is bothering the adopted child. The last thing in the world that child wants to do is get engaged with this abusive father or mother. I mean, they don't want to see these people; they don't want to have anything to do with them.

The other part of it is, we don't know what the feelings of the 19- or 20-year-old child are toward that parent. They may still and would have some feelings toward them, and we don't know how those feelings and emotions are mixed—they can be very, very mixed. The other part of it is, often these people who have been involved in these problems of either mental illness or drug abuse don't have any money. If they were ever taken to court for a no-contact violation, the judge wouldn't throw them in jail. There is no provision to throw them in jail in here. I'm not arguing that there should be, but I'm saying that there's no provision to throw them in jail. So what's the penalty? If you don't have any money or you have little money, you can basically do what you want.

The problem with a no-contact provision is that the person who gets the information—the abusive father or

mother, in the example I'm talking about—is not limited as to whom he can share that information with. It can be shared with any third party, and that third party can use that information however he might want to.

The minister, the parliamentary assistant and everybody says, "Well, this is all about adults." Do you know what? A 19-year-old kid who has been severely beaten up or sexually assaulted or whatever is not a 19-year-old kid who has lived and been brought up in a stable environment, who can go out into the world and make decisions like an adult could. Their emotional age is not necessarily equal to their chronological age.

I was amazed, quite frankly, at what transpired in our committee of the Legislature when we were considering clause-by-clause of this bill. Before we went into the committee—I want to explain what I did with the amendment that I put forward with regard to trying to protect these kids. I took out of the old Bill 183, the previous bill, the sections that were not struck down by the court. The minister was mistaken outside the Legislature when she spoke to the press and said, "The sections relating to the special protection for these severely abused kids have been struck down by the court." That wasn't the case. Judge Belobaba did not strike down these sections, because they weren't under consideration; they weren't dealing with the centre of the legislation in terms of the disclosure, so they weren't struck down.

I went to the minister the night before, because we had had public hearings before, and I said to her, "I want to give you notice"—this was on the Monday, when we had the public hearings. "Here's a copy of the children's aid's submission. I feel very strongly on this. I have asked our legal counsel to prepare amendments for tomorrow afternoon's meeting. I don't want to surprise you. I want you to consider this and give it your best in terms of a possibility of amending the legislation, or, if you have some variation to this, that would be fine with me too, as long as the kids are protected."

We went to the committee and when we got to this particular section I put forward my extensive amendment, which would have allowed the children's aid society to file a disclosure veto going forward for kids who had been severely beaten. At the age of 19, the control would fall into the hands of the child, who then had become an adult, and that child could decide whether they wanted to find out information about their parents. The parents already know about the kid. They've already had their disclosure to some degree because they were involved with the kid before the kid was taken from them, in their house.

Another part that I was a little bit concerned and upset with was the minister, when she was talking about her days as a nurse and they'd take the child from the mother and give it up for adoption. These are not the cases of the child who is wrapped in a pink blanket and left on the doorstep. This is about children who have been taken from their parents, which is the first step the children's aid society does. Then the very dramatic step that happens in only 1% of the cases after that is that those parents don't get access because of the damage that they're doing to the kid. They are the 1% who fall over here, and those are the kids that are put out for adoption. So we're talking I don't know how many cases across the province of Ontario, but not very many.

In my amendments I also allowed that the parents who had abused the child would have a right of appeal to a board, and we were open to making that appeal happen more than once; it could happen when the child was 19, if they wanted, and the board could make the decision. If, 10 years later, there was a rehabilitation of the parent, then they could come again. I thought the amendment was pretty well reasoned and I was really taken aback by the fact that when I asked the reason you didn't include it in here, it was the generic things like we've heard in this Legislature: "Well, it's the proper balance." The proper balance of what? The only balance that I can measure in this legislation is between the rights of the abused child, when they reach 19—and we keep hearing, "This is an adult. The adult can protect herself or himself." I submit that somebody who has just turned 19 and has gone through a horrific childhood, who has fortunately benefited from the fact that they've had a loving parent or parents who have gone through hell and high water in order to bring this child up, who has had all of these psychological challenges and all the rest of it—I don't think they may be in a position to take on the total role of the normal kid who becomes 19 and they all of a sudden find out that their abusive parents or parent have got a hold of their record.

1700

So, I'm really, really troubled by the responses that I'm getting from the minister and that I got from the parliamentary assistant in the committee. It's not people engaged in a discussion as to what's the best piece of legislation—because I don't really consider this legislation to be of a political nature, as I said before. I think it's more about justice and fairness in terms of trying to work out the best set of rights for the people involved in the debate.

We've heard that there are groups who want wide-open access, and I understand their arguments. Those arguments were put before the committee. The courts now have said we can't have wide-open rights going back; we can have wide-open rights going forward. This is the only caveat that I would like to be inserted in going forward. If a person out there was adopted before September 1, 2008, they will have the right of this veto. If you were born on September 1, as opposed to August 31, you won't have that right to veto. All I want in this particular legislation is the right for the small, small number of people.

I might add, too, that the member for Beaches–East York and I tried to make the disclosure even better than the bill was, and there wasn't any listening on the part of the government or the government members to try to reach a more satisfactory solution to opening up. There's really no part of our party or, I believe, the NDP trying to close down records or anything like that. In fact, what we

wanted to do and what we suggested was to try to put some onus on the registrar to contact, if they had a contact number, the mother, in this case, to find out if that mother was still alive or not. Under the legislation, the veto disclosure dies when the person dies. We were told in the committee that the only way that the registrar knows if someone has died or not is if they were a resident of Ontario or a resident of one of the other co-operating provinces in Canada. I estimate, and I'm really ball-parking it, that there's probably going to be something like 15,000 to 25,000 vetoes registered with the registrar, and probably all but 15% or 20% of those 25,000 would be people living in Ontario. What I wanted the government to do, and what I think the member from Beaches–East York wanted the government to do, was to say that after the mother is 75 or 80, there would be an onus on the registrar to try to make a contact to find out if in fact this person had passed away in another jurisdiction. "No, we won't do that. This is our perfect legislation. We want exactly what's in Bill 12. No additions, no minuses, no matter what." What I wanted to do was try to improve the ability of an adoptee to get the information if in fact their natural mother passed away. But you've got to find out whether the mother has passed away, and the registrar is the only person who could do that.

The government has talked about the people who are in favour of their bill. And I understand those groups, because they have been waiting a long time for this bill to pass. But you should really know that one of the largest groups, probably representing in numbers a lot more than the groups that are supporting the bill, has expressed concern about the issue that I have raised here many times in the Legislature, and that is about these severely abused kids. We know that the children's aid societies don't support the exclusion of a veto for these very special kids they have to take care of.

I was talking to one of the adoptive mothers of one of these severely abused kids, and she was also saying to me—look, I think they are saints. The people who take on this particular role—this isn't somebody adopting a normal kid; this is somebody who is adopting a kid who's got severe, sometimes physical but almost always psychological and emotional, problems that will be with them all their lives. These adoptive parents are saints, and to say to them that although you've taken this child into your custody, when that child becomes 19—and maybe they're still living with them and will of course always be attached to them—you're going to unleash or perhaps unleash the abuser, the perpetrator of the abuse that this child grew sick with, on them and their home—I don't think that shows very much respect for the role these people have filled, who voluntarily assumed such a burden for the rest of us in society.

The other part of this that I talked about before was that it's odd, the dichotomies this leads to. What we're doing here in Bill 12 is giving a right to identifying information of a victim, often of a crime—or most times it would be a crime because these assaults were so bad. We're giving a right of access to identifying information of a victim. Our victims' rights bill talks about the right of privacy. I don't think any police force in Ontario or any part of the justice system would ever give an abuser, a rapist or somebody who had attempted murder identifying information about their victim. But what makes it different here? It's because they were the natural mother and father.

I think if you're going to deal with balances here, there's only one way to look at it, and that balance has to be in the hands of the victim. That victim has to have control of the decision whether to make the contact or to find out the information about their parents.

The other part of it is that often these kids, when they turn 16, will—not often; I can't say "often" because I don't know all of the experience, but I'm told by the children's aid society that when the kids reach 16, in order to get away from it—and they're not adopted, but they're in foster homes—they will change their names to have some anonymity with regard to being tracked down by their natural parents. Those kids have control over that anonymity as they go forward.

Can you think of the psychological stress of a kid who is 16 or 17, who knows that when they're 19, their abusive parent could be on the doorstep, and who knows that they could get the information? These kids are psychologically damaged. To not provide them with a little bit of a cushion with regard to how—they should be deciding when the reunion should take place, if ever. That should be in the hands of this small group of citizens of Ontario.

1710

The minister talked about the stakeholders who were in favour of this, and I understand those stakeholders, as I said before. These are the people who wanted, and probably still want, wide-open disclosure, and I understand that. But the children's aid society is against this—53 of them. We have groups like The Gatehouse: Child Abuse Investigation and Support Site here. They weren't even aware of this bill. That's one of the problems with this issue, that it doesn't garner a lot of press and so people out there aren't aware of the issues in it. That's why I feel I have to fight very strongly for those who either don't know or can't speak for themselves.

Unfortunately, we don't have at this point in time a child advocate, because I would expect a child advocate to be speaking out on this bill big-time. I'm going to ask the child advocate, when we get one, what her or his opinion of this legislation might be.

I think I mentioned the no-contact orders. The Ontario children's aid society said, "There is anecdotal evidence that breaches of no-contact notices are more likely to occur in cases where an adoption was not voluntary and the result of a child protection apprehension." That's one of the things that I mentioned before: that you've got to think about the actual facts of all of these cases. The facts are that this child is forcibly taken away by a court. Often during those court proceedings, the CAS has to get restraining orders against the abusing parents to keep

them in control in terms of the whole process. The children's aid society believes, "For an adoptee, where the biological parent did not voluntarily relinquish them for adoption, a no-contact notice, regardless of penalty"—I say that the penalty here is not a real penalty; it's up to $50,000, and I don't imagine a judge is going to give that in many situations—"is not sufficient, nor prudent, when this biological parent has demonstrated a history of severe violence against the adoptee." I think the children's aid society has probably got the hardest job of all in social work. They have to make the decisions about taking a child and trying to improve the situation so the child can go back in the home, and this is the 1% of the cases where that can't happen.

I also heard the minister talk about all of these other jurisdictions where the no-contact orders have worked. As I mentioned before, nobody in their right mind is going to use a no-contact process because they don't want to be involved with the other party. I think most of them would go for a restraining order rather than try to press the issue under this no-contact part.

The other part is, the legislation in British Columbia was the earliest legislation; it came into effect in 1996, Newfoundland in 1999 and Alberta in 2004. If you think about it, this would deal with adoptions after that, so there are probably no kids who have reached 18 or 19 under any of that legislation, so there would not be no-contact orders made or even implemented in any of those provinces yet. You've got to wait another 10 years to find out if the experience in those provinces has any validity in terms of what you're saying. I mentioned the restraining order and the terrible murder in Merritt, British Columbia, about the three kids being killed there and how much a restraining order would mean to them.

I've talked about the privacy commissioner, who has said she supports strong privacy protections, especially for vulnerable groups or persons. That's what the privacy commissioner said to me in a letter. She said that she would support any kind of privacy protections, especially for vulnerable people. That's what my amendment is about. It's about a support for those people.

I'm just flipping through my notes; I wanted to quote the Victims' Bill of Rights. The Victims' Bill of Rights says a victim should "be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect for their personal dignity and privacy" by justice system officials. This is about victims. My amendment is about victims. I suspect that we're breaking the bill of rights with regard to these people.

This month, the government introduced Bill 50 to protect animals from abuse and neglect. Bill 50 proposes to give courts the ability to prohibit someone convicted of abusing or neglecting an animal from ever owning another animal. This same government is attempting to mandate that abusers of children can find out, as a matter of right, the identities of their victims. What do we care about more? Do we care more about our animals than our children? Where is the balance in terms of this legislation?

In talking to Angela Gallant, the program director of The Gatehouse child abuse investigation and support site here in Toronto—this is a woman who oversees some kids who have been abused badly—she told me that allowing an abuser information about their victim risks re-victimization and re-traumatization. The victim must have the power to direct any contact themselves; otherwise, these victims will have to take steps by changing their name again or leaving the country. She suggested that all legislation must be victim-centred. The victim must have the power to decide when and if they ever have any contact from their abuser, whether that abuser is a stranger or a parent.

I don't find Bill 12 victim-centred at all. I can't tell you how disappointed I am with this Legislature not being able to deal with this bill in a reasonable and even-handed manner.

In the debate tonight, I believe we're going to be talking about the standing orders. This government is seeking to obtain even more powers for the centre and for the government-driven side. I understand that in the last two weeks of the Legislature, the government will now be able to pass a bill in two days from start to finish. It takes four days now. We have a government that wants to control when question period takes place—that it take place at a more advantageous time for them and a less advantageous time for the opposition.

1720

As a long-time servant of this Legislature, I get extremely concerned that we can't have a committee, we can't have debate, and the government doesn't seem to be able to say, "Hey, maybe we should listen and change some of the legislation we're putting forward." The changes we're putting forward here on behalf of these kids are very minute in comparison to the overall thrust of the bill. We're not talking about the major sections of the bill this time through; we're talking about a very, very small number of people that we're dealing with.

I want to say as well that both opposition parties have said to the House leader, "Look, put this bill into Committee of the Whole House. Put forward a reasonable amendment that protects these kids. We'll pass it. We'll go into the Committee of the Whole House. We'll be there for an hour, if it takes us an hour. We'll come out of committee and we'll pass the bill on third reading."

It's not our desire to drag this debate on, but I will say this: I'm not going to give up the fight for these kids. I'm going to press and press and press on this fight until this government understands that they cannot treat these kids the same way they're treating normal children, that these kids deserve more protection, that their adoptive parents deserve some consideration. We will fight and fight until we get this changed, and if the government thinks that when they pass third reading of this bill, that is the end, I've got to tell them that it will not be the end from Norm Sterling.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently for 50 minutes to what the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills had to say, and I think it was all encapsulated in the last, say,

minute of what he had to say about his dogged determination and how he is seized with this issue and wants to see it through.

I watched him very carefully in committee as well, and the motion that he put forward. It did not seem to me that the motion was untoward, and it certainly had considerable merit. The motion was not just to stop people from trying to find their relatives after the age of 19 in spite of what might have happened, but it allowed for an appeal mechanism. It allowed for people to go on a basis of maybe every several years to apply, because, as I put to the committee and as I think the member from Mississippi Mills acknowledged, people do change. The fact that a person may have been an abuser—there is every reason to believe that any combination of factors, from jail to psychological reports to counselling to group therapy, may have changed that person, and they ought not to be foreclosed for all time from seeing their natural child.

Be that as it may, he has, in my view, the best interests of the child at heart, and his motion was not successful in committee. He vowed, at that point—and I'm going to refer to it in my own speech which follows—to hold on to this and continue the fight. He has said as much again today.

I believe this issue needs to be resolved. It is certainly not resolved within the bill, but I have no underestimation that, given the length of time that this House may be seized with it on this occasion and possibly others into the future, he or his colleagues will raise it again.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I am pleased to comment on the speech by the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills. It seems to me that we've heard a lot of different interpretations of this bill and that bill and another bill and amendments, and it might be worthwhile to briefly go over what actually is in the bill, if amended, here on third reading so that people understand what will happen.

The basic purpose here is to provide open adoption records, so that when adoptees become adults they have access to their personal records and can find out about their personal birth history, and, conversely, so that birth parents can find out about adult adoptees, not child adoptees.

First of all, if the adoption took place before September 2008, both the birth parent and the adult adoptees will have the choice of whether they want the information disclosed. They will be able to file a disclosure veto if they do not want the information disclosed. That's in line with the Ontario Superior Court ruling, which said that because at the time of the adoption the presumption was that the records would be closed, those people maintain that right to closed records, if they so wished.

For those future adoptions, the situation will be different. When the adoptee turns 18, the adoptee will be able to choose whether they will be able to get the birth parent's information, and also to choose whether they want that birth parent to be able to contact them. If they don't want the birth parent to be able to contact them, they can put a no-contact notice on their information and they will not be subject to contact. If, as Mr. Sterling has suggested—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to comment on the speech from the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills on Bill 12, the Access to Adoption Records Act.

We wouldn't be having this debate today if the government had listened the first time around when Bill 183 was debated and passed, when the member, the dean of the House, then was raising concerns about privacy retroactivity. In fact, they didn't listen to him and they didn't listen to the privacy commissioner, Dr. Cavoukian, so now we're dealing with another bill to address those concerns. I think the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills is raising some extremely valid concerns, trying to protect children who have been severely abused from having information about them disclosed to the abuser.

I just don't understand why the government is not listening this time around as well. The member brought up some reasoned amendments in committee. I would love to have a government member explain why they didn't just pass those amendments, because if they did, I think this bill would be getting passed pretty quickly about now. We seem to be doing this all over again. They didn't listen the first time around and now they're not listening this time around. They just don't seem to get it. I just wish they would listen.

I note today that we had a number of petitions in the Legislature, one by Mr. Hardeman, where he points out the concerns raised by the children's aid societies on this very issue. So I think the government needs to listen to the various groups out there that would like to protect these abused children.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to make a few remarks on the speech from the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills. I think that anyone who has been paying attention to the iterations of this bill over time will know that there are a number of people in this place who have been quite passionate about this issue overall. It's the result of that passion that we've seen the bill change from the way it looked when a member from my own caucus at that time—the member for the riding of Toronto–Danforth, Marilyn Churley—first brought this issue to light, in trying to get some action on this issue, as she is the birth mother of a child whom she gave up for adoption when she was a younger woman. She used her own personal experience to educate and enlighten many of the members of this Legislature on this issue, and I thank her for that.

1730

Subsequently, as the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills mentioned in his speech, there were some issues that arose out of that first draft, and he went through some of those issues in his remarks. Here we are now with another bill in front of us that's been through hearings, that's been through the committee process. The member from my caucus from Beaches–East York will

be speaking to this very, very shortly, and will, I'm sure, raise some issues that he put on the record in regard to possible amendments that came up at the committee process.

I really do believe that at the end of the day, we are in a situation where it might not be absolutely perfect. I have some significant sympathy for the arguments brought by the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, and I encourage him to continue to raise those issues, because they are significant. I think that we around this place can never be flippant when it comes to the way that the legislation we approve affects real people and real circumstances. I thank him for those comments. I think they're important and significant.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I want to thank all of the members for their submissions.

I think this place can work better than it does, and I think this would be a tremendous opportunity for the government to show that bills can be amended, that committees can hear people, that they can make decisions and change legislation. I think it's really, really important.

The minister said something that was kind of odd, in that she mentioned the three other pieces of legislation in Canada, which were passed some time ago, and said, in defence of not putting in a provision with regard to these special children that I want to put in, that the three other provinces don't have this provision in it. I can remember a time when the other provinces always looked to Ontario as the lead in legislation. The provinces of Alberta, BC and Newfoundland would fall in step with where the province was in terms of their thinking on legislation. They would look to us to lead. Here we are, following, and I think that we could make a better bill than they have. I think we can provide open disclosure, but we can also provide additional privacy protection for some of the most vulnerable people in our province.

I urge the government to open their hearts. Let's go into Committee of the Whole House and let's wrap up this bill in a reasonable and logical manner.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I see that I am in the unenviable position again of having a bifurcated speech: half today and half the next time. But I hope to be able to do an equally good job in both halves.

I would like to preface my remarks by commenting about the people who have doggedly, over months and years and decades, fought for open disclosure, some of whom were in the Legislature earlier today and one of whom is still here. My comment to them: They are here to see that justice is done for themselves, their families and their children. They have fought for many, many years for open disclosure, so that people will have the unqualified right of knowing who their parents are and knowing where their children are. I take my hat off to them for the long fight.

I would like to assuage their fears somewhat. I know that they are wondering what is going to happen to the bill and how it's going to proceed, and whether the amendments or the critique that I or my colleagues from the Conservatives might have might put an end to the bill. I would like to assuage that fear by confirming to them that at second reading, members of the NDP did support the bill, notwithstanding that we were unhappy with a couple of amendments that we thought might have made it a better bill.

Notwithstanding that fact, this has been too long a struggle not to pass. I am mindful that the government would, of course, say, "Hurray; we're going to pass it." I'm sure that that is going to be what is in their hearts, if not in the clapping, as I stand here. But it is my responsibility as a member of this Legislature, my responsibility as a member of the opposition to point out potential flaws to any bill. Whether I end up voting for or against it, it is the responsibility of the opposition to be forever vigilant. That is why I stand here to speak to this bill today.

In one of the earlier two-minute comments that I made this afternoon, I talked about my disappointment in hearing both the minister and the parliamentary assistant for this bill refer to the body of the bill and the goodness of the bill and the history of the bill without talking about why the bill was before the Legislature in the first place.

I would like to just quote one paragraph from the decision of Justice Belobaba in the decision of Joy Cheskes, Denbigh Patton, C.M. and D.S. versus the Attorney General of Ontario, with the intervener being the Coalition for Open Adoption Records. Judge Belobaba, in his decision, was very clear, and I think that's why the government of Ontario decided not to appeal it and the intervener decided not to appeal it—because the decision itself was reasonable and it was balanced and it told the government what they had to do.

I would like to quote paragraph 178 of the learned judge's decision, in which he writes: "I have come to this conclusion after much deliberation. No judge takes lightly his or her responsibility as a 'constitutional umpire.' No judge is eager to find that a law enacted by a democratically-elected majority is unconstitutional and must be set aside. But our system of government is not based on majority rule alone. Ours is a constitutional democracy with an entrenched Charter of Rights and Freedoms that is intended primarily to protect individuals and minorities against the excesses of the majority. Included within the charter's ambit of protection are the applicants, who are part of a small minority of adoptees and birth parents that wish to protect their privacy. They have every right to do so. The applicants have established that their right under s. 7 of the charter has been breached, and the government has failed to justify this breach under s. 1."

That, in a nutshell, is why we are here. All of the other statements that are being made by people in this Legislature and across the floor about adoptees having the right to know their birth parents are so much fluff. Of

course, that's true, but that was passed by this Legislature a long time ago. What is before this House today is to follow the dictates and the learned decision of Judge Belobaba and to give effect to what he had to say. I hope that my comments are seen in that light.

I look at how long this community has waited for us to finalize a bill and a law that will stand up in the courts. The law that was put the last time failed after just two days. Two days after it was proclaimed, it was in the court, and this section was subsequently struck down. It is important to note that the balance of the bill was not struck down. The balance of the bill was found to be constitutionally correct, and the judge upheld the decision that was made by this democratically elected Legislature. The judge heard many, many arguments from many people, but he also had a bit of a historical background, which needs to be stated again for the record.

This bill has been before the House for a long time. My colleague Marilyn Churley, formerly from this House in the last Parliament, had been instrumental over a number of years in putting this issue forward. My own records show that this bill was before the House as Bill 88 in December 1998, it was again before the House as Bill 108 in June 2000, it was before the House as Bill 77 in June 2001, it was before the House as Bill 16 in May 2003, and before the House again—all under Marilyn Churley's signature—as Bill 14 in December 2003. Also before the House was another bill purporting to do something similar by a Conservative member, Mr. Wettlaufer. I'm not sure what riding he came from, so I do apologize for that. His was Bill 60, which was before the House in June 2003. All of that, of course, was superseded by the government's own Bill 183, which was debated and passed last year.

1740

Throughout all of that period of time this House has been trying to grapple with a very thorny issue, part of which we are debating here again today. Throughout all of this time, I must state my admiration of former MPP Churley for what she endeavoured to do, the personal struggle that she had. I had known Marilyn for many years before I came to this House. I had known her when I was the mayor of East York and she was the MPP for Toronto–Danforth, which included a part of East York. I even knew her briefly from when she was a city councillor and I was on the council of the borough of East York, we both having been elected on the same night to respective municipalities. In all the time that I knew her, until the day that I opened, I believe, the Toronto Star, although it could have been the Globe and Mail, and read the story of her finding her son, I had never realized that she had a son. I had met her daughter, but I had never realized that she had a son from the time she was 17 years old and, as she went on to describe, a frightened teenager. When I read the story, I have to tell you that I almost broke down in tears, because it was a remarkable story of perseverance of a woman who had struggled and tried for so many years to reunite herself with the son she had given up for adoption when she did so as a frightened teenager, not knowing which way to turn. She had finally been reunited.

Throughout all of these bills—and I've been in the House now closing in on seven years—I constantly listened and tried to gauge what other people were saying vis-à-vis what Marilyn Churley said in that article and what she subsequently said to me about how much it meant to her, how it consumed her, how she was constantly looking, how she didn't know where to turn, how people had come out of nowhere to help her, how she was one day successful.

I've met her son on several occasions—a remarkable young man—and I want to say that his adoptive parents did a very good job in bringing him up. He lives between two worlds, as most adoptees do, having love and respect for his birth mother and love and respect for his adoptive parents who made sure that he grew up right. I ask us all to consider that when we're considering how to make this bill better. The story of Marilyn's son is out there 1,000 or 10,000 or 100,000 times in the history of this province, where children have been given up for adoption. Years go by and people wonder, "Who am I? Where is my birth mother? How will I find her?" Or a birth mother says, "Where is my son? Where is my daughter that I gave up? I really have misgivings now after a few years. I really wish that I could see them. I just want to know that they're okay. I think about them on every birthday. I think about them when it's Christmas. I think about them when they're five years old and they must be starting school. I think about them when they're 15 and wondering if they're going out on their first date. I think about them all the time."

So this bill is essential to pass. As I said earlier, notwithstanding that I'm going to be critical in a minute, it is important that it pass because we need to reunite those families, and if we can't reunite all of them who were adopted before September 2008, then we can make the conscious effort to reunite all of them after that date.

I listened as well to what the government had to say. I have what I can only describe as the government's spin document. This came out on October 12, 2007. I read it and I think—the government members are laughing too. The Ministry of Community and Social Services put out a four-page document outlining the new bill, following Judge Belobaba's decision. They put out what I can only describe as a spin document. I'd just like to read some of it for the record because, in retrospect, it looks like the government is trying to take credit for what they're doing here in pushing this legislation, whereas in fact it is a requirement by the courts and the Constitution.

I start off with the second paragraph in on this document, dated September 4, Toronto:

"'This new information disclosure system makes it easier for adoptees and birth parents to get the information they have been looking for, while also protecting the privacy of those who do not wish to be contacted,' said Meilleur. 'We made a promise and today I am proud to say we are delivering on that commitment.'" There's

no word at all that this was forced upon the government by the courts.

"On September 17, 2007, the Ontario government will be implementing the last phase of Bill 183, the Adoption Information Disclosure Act, 2005. At that time, adult adoptees and birth parents, whose adoptions were finalized in Ontario, will be able to apply for information in adoption orders and original birth records."

This was the last phase of Bill 183. I don't think that was contemplated when Bill 183 was passed by this Legislature, but it was now the new spin that it's the last phase of an older bill rather than a brand new bill and rather than as a result of a court order.

Some of the next one really caught my attention. In the spin of it all, they go on to state:

"This is just one more example of how, working together, Ontarians have achieved results in strengthening Ontario by strengthening Ontario's families. Other results include"—and remember, they're talking about the adoption bill. They go on to talk about "launching a new public awareness website ... AccessON.ca, which challenges attitudes and encourages all Ontarians to learn about barriers to accessibility."

The next two are really unusual:

"Providing nearly $19 million for rent banks to assist vulnerable low-income tenants...." What that has to do with adoptions is beyond any comprehension I might have.

"Implementing a new Ontario child benefit to help nearly 1.3 million children in low-income families." Again, what that has to do with this bill defies description.

I go on to page 3 because there's more stuff. I don't know whether this is contained anymore in the bill, because on page 3, top paragraph, under "Protecting Privacy," they write:

"Birth parents and adult adoptees can apply to the Child and Family Services Review Board ... for an order to prohibit disclosure of identifying information in circumstances where there are concerns about preventing sexual harm or significant physical/emotional harm." That's what they said back then. But, had they accomplished that, I'm sure my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills would not have just given his nearly one-hour leadoff speech.

They go on to state, again on page 3:

"Starting September 17, 2007, adult adoptees and birth parents will be able to apply for information contained in original birth registrations and adoption orders. Adult adoptees and birth parents will still be able to register a 'no-contact' notice, 'contact preference' or 'waiver of protection' on their files." Again, I'm not sure that that happened in the bill at all either.

So there has been a lot of government spin. They've come out and made statements. They've introduced a bill that does not contain those statements. They have tried to take credit when the courts of the province of Ontario have struck down a portion of Bill 183 as being unconstitutional. They have tried to pretend to the press that this is an old bill that is seeking its last couple of amendments, whereas in fact it is a new bill that has been forced through by the courts.

In the committee we had a number of debates and a number of ideas that were floated. I presented one of the ideas after having listened intently to what the deputants who came forward had to state. Every single deputant who came forward, including the privacy commissioner and including Ms. Cheskes, who had been one of the original people who appealed the decision of the Legislature, admitted that there was something inherently wrong when a person could not find out his adoptive parent or parents when an enormous amount of time had passed.

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I proffered a suggestion that people just to try to listen and think about a person 80-plus years old going into the adoption office and saying, "I've just found out I have a terminal illness. I've just found out that I've got a couple of years to live. I've never been able in my whole life to find out who my real parents were. I'm 80 years old. I may not live much longer, and I would really love to know who my parents are." And the person behind the counter, quite rightly, under the purpose and the body of this bill, says, "We can't tell you who your parents were." The man says, "I'm sorry, I'm 83. My mother would now be 104 if she's still alive. I'm sure she's not alive, but can you check it out for me?" And the person behind the counter says, "No, we can't check that out for you because you don't know her name." He says, "I've never known her name. No one would ever tell me her name. Can you please check the records, because she has to be 104 years old. I'm 83. I'm dying. I just want to know before I die who my mother was." And they say, "Did she die in Canada?" Well, how would he know? He doesn't even know her name. All he has and all they would ever have is a birthdate. "Did your mother originally live in this country? Maybe she went back to an old one." "Yes, that's a possibility." Maybe she remarried and moved to the United States. That's a possibility. Maybe she changed her name legally and lived in two or three provinces and ended up dying in British Columbia and nobody put the whole thing together.

Nobody in the government could come up with that. Nobody could say that that was right.

We believe that a person needs to be able, at some point in their life, to access that record. We are suggesting only that a person has to be able to find out—a presumption has to be made when a birth parent is over the age of 80 that they may be deceased. The government was buying none of it. We put in a motion. I have to admit, I stole the motion almost word for word from what was passed in New Zealand. I took the motion that was used there, which talks about a 10-year revolving opportunity to re-register an objection to disclosure, and I looked at that and I thought: Could that work in Ontario? Would this satisfy what the learned judge had to say? Maybe it would and maybe it wouldn't—and I'll get to the privacy commissioner in a moment, who suggested to

me that it wouldn't. But what we were trying to do was to make an opportunity that, when it wasn't re-registered, a person could then go in and say, "I have to assume that my mother or my father, well into their 80s, who haven't re-registered this, may be dead. Can you at least look at that for me?" But this was not to be. The government shot it down. Every single one of the five members would not listen to it.

But I did get the ear of the privacy commissioner, and I would just like to read for the record an exchange between the two of us on this very issue.

"Mr. Michael Prue: Really, we're trying to be open, especially at the point where the birth parent or parents die. At that point, the records are supposed to be unsealed. I'm thinking about the hundreds or maybe thousands of people whose parent or parents may die in another jurisdiction and for the help of the Ontario government to determine that. That's what I'm trying to do.

"Dr. Ann Cavoukian: Mr. Prue, I'm going to be really honest with you. I would like to turn my mind to that question because I'm not just going to agree with you and I'm not going to disagree with you either, because I truly have not weighed how one would do that. There is possibly a privacy-protective way of doing it and I would like to have an opportunity to consider how that would be conducted in a very fair and balanced way to all parties. I'm not ruling it out. I would consider finding an instrument, looking for a way to do that—a procedure or a process—but I'm not going to just agree right now because I haven't turned my mind to it.

"Mr. Michael Prue: Well, of course, but you do agree to turn your mind to it?"

"Dr. Ann Cavoukian: I would consider it."

Then the last two statements. By me: "All right. So if I were to write you a letter after this committee has deliberated, you would turn your mind to it?" And her answer: "I would turn my mind to it."

The reason I'm quoting that is because there was an honest attempt made by me—and I'm going to deal with the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills in a moment—to try to actually make the legislation better, to close up a couple of loopholes: one to make it more open and one, potentially, slightly, to make it more closed, in the case of incest or child abuse or horrific crimes. It appears to me that in both cases Dr. Cavoukian was there and in both cases supported what we had to say. It may have been an imperfect instrument. I recognize that what I proposed—she did not agree with the 10-year rotation. She did not agree with that. But she did agree that something needed to be done.

It was very difficult, because we had two days of hearings. That is all that we were allowed to have: one day to hear from the community, the people who had fought for 10 long years for what they needed and what they wanted, and the other day to look at the amendments. We had from 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock, when we finished hearing heart-wrenching, gut-wrenching stories of people's lives, until the next day at noon to craft the amendments and then have them both shot down.

I think our amendments were good ones. I think what we were trying to do is to help this bill along, to pass it as rapidly as possible, because we can't wait anymore, but in the end to look to those children who would go to their graves without knowing who their parents were, might never know who their parents were, even when there is every reasonable expectation that the parents might be dead.

I have Dr. Cavoukian's statement, and I have written her a letter, which I have not signed yet or sent. I did promise to do it after the committee had finished its deliberations, which they have, but I think I should also wait until after the Legislature has determined what it is doing with this bill. I have it here. I expect to send the letter and to seek her support in finding a way to make the adoption records more open, to make sure that every single child who has had it sealed before September 2008 will be able to find out—if it's done through age, if it's done by length of time, if it's done from any information they have that merely suggests that one or both of their parents may be deceased. I intend to pursue that. I hope I pursue that with the same dogged determination with which my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills will pursue his.

Mr. Speaker, I'm about to start talking about his contribution to the debate within committee and where I think that particular one should go, but I am mindful of the clock. Would this be a good time for me to cede the floor for today?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I was just about to look at my watch. This House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The House adjourned at 1759.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Monday 28 April 2008

Lundi 28 avril 2008

LEGISLATIVE

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 28 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 28 avril 2008

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 23, 2008, on the amendment to the motion by Mr. Bryant to amend the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member from Eglinton–Lawrence, you have about five minutes left on your speech from the other day.

Mr. Mike Colle: Yes, thank you. Last week, I was essentially talking about the various changes that have taken place in this Legislature over the last number of years, and I was just recalling the 1990s, when there were some pretty dramatic changes that took place. In fact, I can remember, as a result of those changes, there was the famous situation where the Honourable Alvin Curling had to make a statement in a very unusual way, but I think he made a very important statement, that the changes that were undertaken in this Legislature were quite unusual and quite draconian.

I can remember just sitting right across the way there. We were here for I don't know how many days and nights around the clock, and that was really part of Bill 26. I can remember many Conservatives who came before the Legislature, came to hearings and said they had been lifelong Conservatives and would never have anything to do with the party after those changes. It was the infamous Bill 26, the omnibus bill of omnibus bills.

The changes being offered at this point in time are modest proposals compared, again, to the upheaval that took place at that time. I think what is contained in the motion here is quite reasonable. As I said last week when I spoke, there's nothing perfect about any changes that are proposed by any government, but these changes that we're debating today are also subject to review.

It would be incredible, almost an oxymoron, to talk about the former government of the Honourable Mike Harris and say that he would review anything. He basically would say, "This is right. I'm doing it. You're wrong, and we're going ahead," and doing whatever it is. Whether it was amalgamation, market value assessment, he did it and said he was right. "I'm going to sell the 407. It's right." That was the way things were done, where we never had the luxury, when those changes were made by the Conservative government, of any review whatsoever. There was no motion. There was no debate. There was no time for any kind of discussion—zero. It was just done.

It's quite incredible to see members of the Conservative Party standing up and talking about protecting democracy and the rule of democratic process when they sat in utter silence as the omnibus Bill 26 totally devastated any chance of debate. There was no debate; it was just done.

We are putting forward a fairly modest change in the hours of this Legislature, which is quite reasonable; plus, it is subject to review after the spring session to see if there can be some improvements made. I think that's quite a rational approach. It's dramatically different from the approach we've seen before, the last time any changes were made in this Legislature.

What is so dramatic in the change that's before us: the time change of question period? Let's look at it, debate it and see if it works or not. Question period and the hours of debate are going to continue. There's going to be more opportunity for private members' hours and debate. So what is the big—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: We are not like the Conservatives, who basically said, "My way or the highway." Like amalgamation, they forced it down our throats, and 76% of the people of Toronto said no to it. They still drove it down and had no debate on it—no debate.

Now we are debating this, as we should. We're seeing whether the motion is the right one, because we have review. I can just recall, again, that we went through order after order of changes that had no consultation, no debate. Basically, they had pride in saying, "We have all the answers." That's what they did. Day after day they stood in this House on this side and said, "We know everything. We are going to fix government"—they didn't say they were going to fix government—"We are going to basically create the crisis, destroy government and all of a sudden create a new regime here."

Therefore we in a very modest way are saying that there are some things that could be changed here. Let's look at these changes and see if they work better for the people of Ontario. Really, I would like to see the members opposite tell us: What's the big deal here? What is the big deal? There's going to be review to see if things can be made even better. I think that's a very reasonable approach. That's why I support the motion before us.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I would like to answer directly the previous member with regard to these standing order changes. Mr. Colle, the whip, don't you understand that what your government is trying to do—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Through the Chair, please.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: What they're trying to do is have the power to pass a bill in two days instead of four. That's half the time. This is not a big deal? It's the biggest deal of all.

On that, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1853 to 1953.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Mr. Sterling has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour will please rise and remain standing. Thank you.

All those opposed will please rise and remain standing. Thank you.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 6; the nays are 30.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I declare the motion lost. Mr. Sterling.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: This is probably the fourth or fifth reiteration of the standing orders that I have been involved with and participated in. Save and except in minority Parliaments—I think we revamped the standing orders in 1987, before the 1987 election—they have, in large degree, diminished the role of the opposition and centralized power into the Premier's office and into the executive council, the cabinet.

Interestingly enough, in 1987 it was my suggestion that the opposition be given the opportunity to respond to ministers' statements, so the opposition's response in five minutes each was a direct result of my intervention back in 1987, because the minority Liberal government of the day didn't have any alternative but to accept what the opposition put forward. So it wasn't out of the goodness of the heart of the government of the day. But now what I have seen—and I just wanted to talk about ministerial statements for a moment—is that governments have learned how to use ministerial statements and not give the intent of the change of the rule to the opposition. My view is this: If the government of the day speaks for 10 minutes, then opposition parties should be given five minutes each. If they speak for 14 minutes by stacking all their ministers on top of each other—which is what government started to do back when we were in government and now has been picked up by the Liberals. They stack them all together, so they diminish the opportunity of the opposition to respond. If they come in, as they did today, with four or five ministers making statements, they may have taken up—I can't remember the time spent, but let's say they took 18 minutes. We were still limited to five minutes to respond, and I think there were four ministers involved. It's difficult for each critic in the opposition parties to have a say in a total of five minutes. That's a standing order which I would encourage the government and the Legislative Assembly to amend, to make it more favourable to the opposition and more fair to the opposition in terms of their ability to respond.

I think it's interesting to note that we put on the table a shorter question period, because I believe that question period is too long in this place. An hour is far too long. If the federal government can get along with 45 minutes, I don't understand why the province of Ontario can't get along in 45 minutes. However, when I was the government House leader, I talked to the then-opposition House leader, Mr. Duncan, and I said to him, "You know, question period is too long." His response was that they would agree to cutting it back to 45 minutes if the government backbenchers didn't have the opportunity to ask questions. I think that's too dramatic in that if a government backbencher has a legitimate question—and I don't think I've heard one legitimate question in this session of Parliament by a government backbencher; they've been puffery questions and, "Minister, tell us how wonderful you and your programs are." But if we had a 45-minute question period that was to start at a certain time, preferably in the afternoon, of course, and if we had strict enforcement, gave discretion to the Speaker to really call the members in line—and of course we already have that under standing order 36(a), where it says that "the Speaker shall disallow any question which he or she does not consider urgent or of public importance." There's another part of the standing orders on questions too, 36(d): "In putting an oral question, no argument or opinion is to be offered nor any facts stated, except so far as may be necessary to explain the same; and in answering any such question, the member is not to debate the matter to which it refers."

I don't know how many times we've heard Liberal backbenchers get up and start talking about a generic issue. It's not urgent; it's an issue in which they are trying to promote something and it would be better put off into the ministerial statements. If ministers want to stand up in the House and brag about a program, brag about it in ministers' statements.

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My view is that these standing order changes that are now being put forward are more about jockeying for position and enhancing the power of the executive and of majority governments than seeking real change to make this place much more relevant than it is now.

I don't know if backbench members realize the embarrassment they cause themselves by asking these soft questions as they're thrown to ministers. I know that when I was sitting on that side, I would have the Premier's office come up and say, "You know, Norm, you've got to take a question today. I want you to take a question." I would say, "Well, what's the question?" They would tell me the question, and it was useless. I

used to say, "I ain't taking those questions. If somebody wants to ask me a legitimate question about something that's happening in the riding, I will answer it and I will deal with it as a minister of the crown." But members of the Legislature who are asked—and there are a certain number of them who do it day after day—should really reflect upon it and wonder whether or not this is really enhancing their reputations, not only in terms of the public but in terms of the media and in terms of their colleagues in the Legislature. I really question whether or not they are enhancing their reputations and moving forward. I think it's something which members and ministers should do on rare occasions, and only if extremely pressed.

We heard from the previous speaker that these changes don't have a real effect on the Legislature. I would argue that they do, because having the question period at that time of the day I think is really going to affect the ability of the committee that I chair, the public accounts committee, to function as we have in the past. During question period we will no doubt not have any committees sitting; during routine proceedings we will not have any committees sitting. It's a practice of our committee to start at 9 o'clock on Thursday morning and go sometimes to 12, 12:30 or even 1 o'clock, if in fact the particular matter takes that period of time. So we need somewhere between three and four hours in order to conduct and complete our business. I just don't see, in the way that the question period is plunked in the middle of the morning, that we are going to be able to achieve that block of time that we need. And we need a block because, as you know, Madam Speaker, as you are a member of the public accounts committee, we have very important people in front of us. We have the deputy ministers, we have a lot of their staff, and I don't think it's fair to them to ask them to come for an hour and a half in the morning and come back at noon, in two pieces. We often ask people from out of town to come to that particular committee. It's much easier for them to deal with the morning than it is dealing with the very, very late afternoon. That's the effect it's going to have on our committee's time schedule.

The other thing that's really noteworthy here is that we used to be able to guarantee that private members' business on Thursday morning attracted at least a cadre of people into this place. I think it was the NDP government that found out in the early 1990s—one member of my caucus, David Turnbull, came in at 10 o'clock in the morning, he looked around the Legislature in private members' business, and there were only five or six members there. He called a quorum call, nobody showed up, and the day was cancelled. The penalty, of course, for the government was that they lost a whole day of the legislative session. The trick in the rules now is, with the business at the back end of Thursday afternoon, how much attention is going to be paid to it by members of this Legislature? Members will know that they come in here—

Mr. Bruce Crozier: All of the media will be here.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Oh, yeah. The media will all be here, I'm certain.

Private members' hour is a very, very important time for many of the members here. It's their one time in about every year and a half where they get a call on what's going to be discussed in this Legislature. They get a call on putting forward their particular matter. But I think that by switching public members' business to the back end of Thursday, you're going to have a tough time getting members to attend those sessions. I believe that the quorum will fall from time to time. If it falls, what will happen is that the Legislature will dissolve for the day and private members' business, or maybe the next private members' business, will be gone, and that will be it, whereas there was pressure on the government to keep the quorum going on Thursday mornings, because they didn't want to lose the legislative session on Thursday afternoon. It's a little bit of a wrinkle in the rules, but it's something that's important.

I spoke briefly before the adjournment about the ability of the government to pass legislation in quick order. We have a process here where a bill is introduced and the bill must be printed and appear in the order paper before it can be called for second reading debate. And the time really starts running from the time you call the first second reading debate and you finish the bill. Under our present rules, the minimum time that it would take you to do that would be four days because of the complexity of the rules; I won't go into all of the machinations of it. But under these standing orders, in the dying two weeks of the legislative session before Christmas and before summer, the government will be given the power to do that in two days. That's a concern, because when governments stampede legislation through this place, it's often not well thought out and there has to be a time for the public to react. There has to be a time for the public to go to their MPPs and express their opinion, and the debate should take some period of time. This is a tremendous reduction of time from four to two days. It also, of course, gives the government the right to sit until midnight in those last two weeks, which, because of the change in terms of the definition of "day" from a legislative session to two hours, they can start stacking the two hours on top of each other, thereby achieving the rapid passage of the legislation, perhaps to the detriment of the people of Ontario.

I can talk a little bit about the process of going to the legislative committee on procedural affairs. I don't know whether that is going to achieve anything in the end. I think that the best way to deal with changes of rules is to get a couple of people in from each party who lived through changes and negotiate with them. If the government wants to pull on one string, then they should be willing to give up on another string with regard to changing the rules that may favour the opposition a little bit more than the government.

Having said all of that, I'm sorry to say that I believe that this place is becoming more irrelevant as the days go by. This has to do not with the standing orders but with

the attitude of the Premier and the executive council—of any government. If they don't want to listen, if they don't want to answer, then it doesn't really matter what the standing orders are or what the rules are. This place was for debate. This place was for ministers to listen and not chirp in when they're not asked to. This place was to try to make legislation better. I don't see us going on that trend line.

I really think that until we get a Premier strong enough to stand up to the media and say, "There has been a good suggestion from the opposition. There have been good suggestions in debate. We should accept those and make our laws better," whether we have question period in the morning or the afternoon doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether we have question period in the morning or the afternoon if the Premier and his ministers don't answer the questions that are asked in this place. If they talk about rose-coloured glasses when they're asked serious questions, that doesn't add anything to the confidence of the public that we are representing their interests.

I think that these standing orders will not make this a better place to be in. I don't think it will make a better Parliament. I don't think we'll make better laws because of those changes.

I think it will take a very strong leader in this Legislature to do things like giving the Speaker more discretion to make real rulings about the relevance of what is going on in this place. I think it will take a real leader to say that government will not control the Board of Internal Economy and that people in this place will get reasonable resources to do their research, to do their work in this Legislature. With that, I would like—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Order. I can't hear the member. I would ask for order, please.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I wasn't going to move adjournment of the House, but I will move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Mr. Sterling has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the please of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1943 to 2013.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Mr. Sterling has moved the adjournment of the House.

All those in favour, please stand and remain standing. Thank you.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing. Thank you. Please be seated.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 6; the nays are 30.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I declare the motion failed.

Mr. Sterling, I believe you have a minute left on the clock.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): No, sorry. My mistake. Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I'd just like to know whether the Speaker has control of this place or the Clerk of the House has control of this place.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Actually, the clock does, Mr. Sterling. Thank you so much.

Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to start out my comments with a quote from March 4, 1997, and I ask all members of the House to try to think who actually said this. It was somebody here: "Democracy imposes responsibility on those who govern. Democracy gives the people a voice, but it also compels those who govern to listen to that voice. Democracy isn't just something that takes place once every four years"; it's supposed to happen "each and every day."

Who said it? Dalton McGuinty said it. So I'm going to hold the government and the Premier of this province to those very words, because I think what we have in evidence here with the standing order changes is the tyranny of the majority. It's interesting to look at the etiology of that phrase, "tyranny of the majority," because there are all sorts of different theories about who said it first. As close as I could find, it seems to me that Ben Franklin said it first, talking about the tyranny of the majority.

What the standing order changes really are: There's what they present themselves to be and then there's what they really are. What they present themselves to be, of course, from the government side, is that they're family-friendly and that they rationalize the hours of work with the hours that other Ontarians work. What they really are is an absolutely direct and partisan attack on the role of the opposition. Because it's a partisan attack on the role of the opposition in this House, it is also an attack on democracy and an attack on the electorate in Ontario. Again, I want to definitely make clear that we in the New Democratic Party don't have a problem with the general thrust of the standing order changes. But we do have a serious problem, a perhaps insurmountable problem, with the change of the question period.

I'll go into that further, but first, why is it not family-friendly? The government side has said they've made these changes to be family-friendly. Look at evening sittings as a case in point. Evening sittings—it was interesting: I went through Hansard and read the comments of the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, who talks about her beautiful children, and the fact that she would like to be home with those beautiful children around the dinner hour. I think every mother and, hopefully, every father can ring with this, that when your children are little, you want to be there at least until they go to bed, in that 6 to 8 or 9 time slot in the evening.

Surely, then, evening sittings in this House are not family-friendly, yet the member herself voted for evening sittings. In fact consistently, over and over, the Liberal Party, the Dalton McGuinty government, has voted for evening sittings over the concerns of the opposition.

Evening sittings surely are the most family-unfriendly move of all. What's amazing when you read through Hansard on this debate of the standing order changes is the number of Liberal women who voted for evening sittings who now speak against evening sittings. One has to ask, is this a kind of road-to-Damascus change or is this really just subterfuge? My point is that this is subterfuge, because this is not about family-friendly at all. This is about an attack on the opposition's role and about its ability to function; also, by the way, the press's ability to function and the electorate's and democracy's in the Westminster model's ability to function.

If they really wanted to be family-friendly, here are some suggestions. Number one, they would have an in-house daycare centre at Queen's Park so that young mothers and fathers who have small children could have somewhere to bring their children. We could go on about daycare and the lack of it in the province of Ontario generally, but certainly there should be something here. This would be not only practical, it would also be symbolic. It would say that this government actually cared about children and about the role of family.

Another thing they could do—and I brought in this motion last year that I called A Place for All People—is to have a room set aside, and we even pointed out the room it could be, for those of other faiths, representing the diversity of this place, who could go and fulfill their religious obligations. So we're talking about our Muslim members, our Sikh members and others who have to walk across five lanes of University Avenue to go to the Hart House chapel in the middle of the winter to do that; also, the Humanist Society and anybody else who wants to use the room. We don't have that room, hence this place really isn't family-friendly.

That's what they would do if they wanted to make it family-friendly. They would never have voted for evening sittings, they would have daycare in this premises and across the province, and they would have a place where people can fulfill their religious obligations. That's what they'd do. So it's not about being family-friendly, nor is it about rationalizing our workdays with the rest of Ontario's workdays. I think it was cynical in the extreme that the Premier of this province would make the assertion that we in the opposition just don't want to work hard and that we don't want to come in early. We all know—backbenchers, the Liberal Party, everybody knows—that we work extremely hard in this role. We choose it, but we work hard. We work starting at 9—at least 9—in the morning, usually earlier. We know that we work from 9 in the morning because we have committee meetings then, and we have caucus meetings; I know all the caucus meetings are in the morning. We know that we already work in the morning, so it's not about workload. It's not about rationalizing our work with others in Ontario.

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We know—and perhaps this is one of the myths that needs to be dispelled: that politicians, that MPPs don't work hard. We know we work hard. We work seven days a week. When we're not here, we're in our ridings and attending functions in our ridings. That's what we do. We choose this role, but it's not an easy role. We're certainly here early in the morning, and we don't have any problem with being here early in the morning.

I want to hold out too, to that cynical view that we don't work hard in the opposition or don't want to, that we, particularly in the New Democratic Party, carry a number of portfolios. I have four portfolios, so I have to know the issues related to my four areas of responsibility. I hold that against any member of the government side. Even the cabinet ministers have only one, and when they have that one area of responsibility, they have an entire staff and an entire ministry that helps them with that. We on the opposition side, who have an executive assistant, at best, at Queen's Park, have to do the work that they do with very little staff, and sometimes the work of more than one of them with very little staff. So it's not a question of workload.

It's a shame that that point was put forward by the government, because it diminishes us all. It adds to the cynicism of the electorate. It adds to low voter turnout. It adds to the conception that the public has—a misconception—that we don't work hard, that we don't put in the hours like they do. Shame on the government for putting forward that assertion.

So it's not about family-friendly and it's not about rationalizing work hours. What it is about is a direct partisan attack on the opposition.

We know that this is an intensely partisan place. We know, in a sense, it's a place of verbal warfare at times. I mean, the mace is a weapon. That is its symbolism: It's a weapon. We know the distance between the government and our side is a distance of two swords drawn. That's the history of this place, because, literally, two swords sometimes would be drawn. We know that it's intensely partisan, but perhaps those who are watching at home don't know quite how intensely partisan it is. Sometimes the spin of the government lets them think that it's not.

Let me tell you a little bit about my experience coming here as a new member, which was only two years ago, introducing my first bill of substance, Bill 150, about the $10 minimum wage. You learn very quickly in this place that a private member's bill from the opposition side has no chance. Let me say that again: no chance of ever becoming law in the province. So we walk into a place that is really not transparent and democratic already. We already did that; we already knew that. We know that even if it passes second reading, it will be kyboshed by the government and never make it to committee. We already know that. We know in the opposition that the best we can hope for—the very best—in a majority government like this one is that the government takes up our bill and makes it their own. This is called plagiarism in the school system, but here it's called politics. The government takes up our bill in the opposition, makes it their own and introduces it.

One of my most poignant memories from my first year in service here was when the government did just that. It

was the member from Hamilton Centre's bill. She worked very hard on it. It was concerning firefighters—I'm sure I'm tweaking some memories here. And what do we know, but a member of the government, the Minister of Labour at the time, stood up and introduced a bill—very similar; almost the same—with not a word of credit to the member of the opposition who had worked so hard on this—I know others can ring with this experience too—and introduced it as their own. That's as good as it gets. That's as good as it gets in opposition. And I might say that for the backbenchers on the government side, it doesn't get much better.

We saw a member here, the member for Niagara Falls, who introduced a perfectly valid bill trying to include grandparents in the Family Law Act the other day. We spoke in favour of that bill, on this side of the House, three times. Three times this member of the government introduced a private member's bill. Will it have a chance of passing? Only they know, but chances are no. So this goes even for backbenchers who have legitimate concerns on the government side. Already there's very little chance, if not none, that a private member's bill will pass.

What do we have left? Here is what we have left. The same way that the $10 minimum wage campaign was built, we have the chance to galvanize public support, to speak on behalf of the public and of stakeholders in this place, to galvanize a grassroots campaign that will hopefully get the press excited, that will put pressure on the government, that will somehow—I've always used the metaphor about pushing an elephant uphill—push the elephant uphill just an inch, so that maybe the elephant will react, maybe we'll get some response, maybe something will happen for our stakeholders, for our public, on behalf of the government. We live for that moment in opposition.

The crux of that moment, the jewel of the Westminster system, the one hour in which we get to hold the government's feet to the fire, to make all of this public, is that hour we call question period. That's the crux of our Westminster system. When we complain on this side that what they are doing with the standing order changes is a direct attack on democracy, we're essentially saying it's a direct attack on all we've got left over here, which is question period, and the organizing that we do with stakeholders that leads up to question period.

We're not alone in this. We know we're not alone in this. We know that the press gallery has given their unanimous opinion with Randy about this. They've said unanimously that these order changes are bad for the freedom of the press. The press, let us remind everyone here, is an essential component of democracy. So when they're angry, when they're upset, when they say with one voice, "There's something wrong," we should listen. We should listen because they also speak for the public. So they've said it's wrong.

We also have Graham White, the legislative expert, who has come out publicly and said that this is not appropriate, that this is, again, a direct partisan attack on democracy.

Christina Blizzard talked about the fact that this is a way of the cabinet hiding, because, of course, now the press has two full scrums. With the standing order changes, they will only really get one.

The other way it's an attack is that it hastens the passing of legislation. Now the government can pass legislation in maybe four days. Let me make very clear that the role of the opposition is to frustrate the government in passing legislation that we feel is inappropriate and bad for the electorate. That is our job. Our job is to oppose that legislation because, remember, they had a mandate, a majority mandate to govern, but not necessarily a majority mandate over every single bill that they bring in. No. There again we hear from our constituents, the press hears, we all hear from stakeholders who say no to some bills and no to some legislation. It is our job—trust me, this is the crux of democracy—to hold the majority to account to their very own electorate. This is what takes away from what Ben Franklin called the tyranny of the majority and makes it simply the majority in a democracy, and that's our role here.

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We cannot emphasize that role enough. Their partisan role—not their democratic role, but their partisan role—is to frustrate us in our enacting of democracy itself. Really, their role here is to eliminate the opposition; let us be clear about that. Their role here is to silence the opposition, to eliminate it. That is the thrust of partisan politics.

But I remind those across the aisle that things change and those across the aisle over there might one day be those across the aisle over here, and exactly this role is the role that, in a sense, is most quintessentially important: to remind them of that—that very fact that times change.

I want to sound the ethical bell here, because it's not only a matter of procedure; it's a matter of ethics. It's a matter of being heard. When KI came down here to demonstrate on the lawns of Queen's Park, can you imagine, if we had a question period at 10:45 and not at 1 o'clock, getting people from northern Ontario down to Toronto organized there? You can see it would be difficult, if not impossible. This is about transparent democracy in action. We need to be able and stakeholders want to be able to galvanize their discontent—and it is often discontent—with the government's actions. They need to be able to do that, and to do that well. They can't do it at 9 o'clock in the morning; they can't do it knowing that all of the cabinet ministers will be out of here, that it will be empty of cabinet ministers at about 1 o'clock.

I find it really quite hypocritical, the smear on the opposition that we don't want to work, when in fact we know what's going to happen in this place, particularly on Thursday afternoons when private members' public business will be debated: There will be nobody on the benches opposite—there will be very few. It will look like this on Thursday afternoons; this is what it will look

like. When we're debating some important points, nobody will be here; they'll be running back to their ridings. We know that cabinet ministers and others on the government side will be back in their ridings doing the photo ops in the afternoon. We know the news that could be so salient at 6 o'clock will be old news with a question period at 10:45, and that by 11 o'clock it will be yesterday's news.

To keep the public current, informed, listening and watching, we need a vibrant question period at a time of the day when the press can get the most out of it, when the public can hear what the problems and concerns of the day are and when they can mobilize around it, in the morning or in the afternoon, to get people here when people are actually paying attention to who's here. That's the reality.

Again, to reiterate, this is not about family-friendly. It's certainly not about democracy. Many others have spoken to the fact that there was no consultation. I went to two House leaders' meetings as deputy whip, when the whip was away. Both of them lasted a total of half an hour. I heard more from the House leader in this House on the rationale behind these standing order changes than I ever heard in the House leaders' meetings. That's not democracy, that's not transparent and that's not engaging the opposition; that's playing to the camera. Maybe we should have a camera in House leaders' meetings. Maybe then we'd have more of a flow of democracy there.

This isn't about family-friendly, this isn't about rationalizing work hours; this is a direct shot across the bow of the opposition, a direct, partisan attack in a very partisan place called Queen's Park, and neither the electorate nor the press are really fooled by this. We will make sure that they continue to hear about it. We don't want a tyranny of the majority here.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I will be sharing my time with the member for Scarborough Centre.

I would like to express my gratitude for our government's decision to explore ways in which we can modernize the Legislature by changing the standing orders. One of the important questions in this debate which deserves a non-partisan and thoughtful answer is, "Do we sincerely believe that Queen's Park should be more family-friendly in order to attract more women into provincial politics?" I believe that this question deserves an affirmative answer.

The Progressive Conservative platform said they would, "work with MPPs to reform Ontario's provincial Parliament based on our four principles," the fourth being to "encourage more diversity and gender balance through family- and MPP-friendly reforms."

In February, the member for Nepean–Carleton praised our government's proposed changes. She said, and I quote, from the Canadian Press news, February 11, 2008, "I'm encouraged the government is thinking outside the box and looking at ways to make the Legislature more family-friendly."

On the challenges facing MPPs, the former member from Nickel Belt said, and I quote from the Hamilton Spectator of July 12, 2007, "'Some weeks my son had four hockey games to attend,' said Martel, whose children are nine and 12. 'I was getting ready for the next campaign, and I thought, I can't do this again for another four years. I can't manage the travelling and homework and doctors' appointment and birthdays. I've tried as hard as I can.'"

On the same issue, the member for Hamilton Centre said, and I quote the Toronto Star of September 10, 2007, "'The job isn't family-friendly anymore,' agrees Horwath, whose son, 14, has been dragged to more political barbecues than she cares to remember. 'We need to keep acknowledging that barriers are there, and let's not pretend they're all gone,' she said."

The proposed changes are in the public interest, and I believe that the citizens in my riding of Mississauga–Brampton South will appreciate that their local representative will start legislative work in the morning and finish by dinnertime, with the exception of when the duty of my office requires me to do otherwise.

We are indeed privileged to live in a province blessed with natural beauty, densely populated with trees, shrubbery, greenery and nests. Every day, when evening descends and twilight appears on the horizon, the law of nature prevails: Birds, including eagles, return to their nests, rub their beaks with each other's, and then, hugging their little ones, they retire to rest in the security and warmth of their nests.

Every one of us fully understands the demanding nature and serious responsibilities we undertook when opting to be MPPs. By the same token, every one of us also fully understands the nature of our responsibilities towards our families and children, which cannot and should not be ignored, if the balance can be achieved by adjusting the hours of this Legislature. The trial for modernizing the Legislature is only exploring the possibility of a balance to fulfill these two very important responsibilities.

There was a time when our forefathers would use the bark of a tree in order to write, but today, we use computers. Change can be stimulating. It can be very easy; it can be very difficult. It can also invoke new challenges for some of us. But I believe the proposed changes to the standing orders will bring positive results.

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I'm happy that we are expanding debate time and increasing private members' public business time. I also believe that by eliminating evening sittings, we are encouraging more women to enter provincial politics.

It is in this very context, when I look to the owl on the wall of this Legislature facing the government benches, in the wisdom stimulated by the glow of his beautiful wide-open eyes, that I see the expression of gratitude for my government's initiative to explore ways in which we can modernize the Legislature. I believe this is a step in the right direction, and I fully support it.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm absolutely privileged to follow the member from Mississauga–Brampton South, who spoke extremely well today, telling us about some of her

own experiences here, as a woman who has chosen a political career, talking about how she feels personally about the rule changes and how they affect her, and also talking about how we all have to adapt to change in everything we do. No matter what profession we're in, no matter what line of work, no matter where we live, change is something that's constantly happening and we must adapt to change. I think the member expressed that extremely well.

She suggested that change can be stimulating. I agree with that. I think change is important. I think we have to be in a constant state of change. In particular, if we're trying to represent what's going on outside of this building, we've got to be able to change. We do things; we should be in a constant state of change.

Yes, the traditions of this place are extremely important to each and every one of us. We all respect the traditions here—at least, most of us do. One of the reasons why many of us are here is out of respect for the traditions. I think each and every one of us in this place respects the position of being a member of provincial Parliament. I think it's something we're all very, very privileged to serve in; it's something that I think we all feel very honoured to be part of. That being said, we all have a responsibility, before we leave here, that we do everything we can to make this place better for the next group of MPPs who come in.

This is an opportunity to try something a little different. It's not extremely different; it's a little bit of shuffling around of the timetable. My goodness, you would think that what we're talking about here is some kind of dramatic shift; that somehow we're getting rid of question period, that we're doing something draconian. We're changing around the times when we do things. It's fairly slight, but it will ensure that we have fewer of these night sittings that we're engaged in, like we are tonight. It won't eliminate them altogether, and I think reasonably so. The government needs to know that at the end of a session, when things get sometimes logjammed, we have to probably sit a little more to make sure we get the bills through that we all want to get through this place. That makes sense. I think it's rational; I think it's reasonable that we may have to have some additional night sittings.

I sat through a number of night sittings last session, and I know many of the members here—the member from Northumberland is nodding his head. He sat through many night sittings, Madam Speaker, and I know you did as well, that weren't exactly stellar debate moments, weren't exactly moments when this place rose to the level that I think we rose to on Sunday, when we came together and showed what can happen when we all work together. In fact, I think there have been many moments in some of these night debates when some of us went home a little embarrassed about what our constituents would have watched on TV.

It's not just the opposition; it's probably all of us. When we get tired, when it gets late at night, when the place is pretty much empty, as it is tonight, other than the security guard upstairs there—I can see him—a few others over here and our Hansard people, there are not a lot of other people watching the debate here in this place and the tenor of the debate can kind of change.

Sometimes it gets a little more easygoing and less partisan. We've had some good moments in the evenings when that happens. Sometimes it gets little jocular, and sometimes that can be fun as well, but other times the debate has declined to a level that I think is probably beneath this place. So changing the way we do things, getting rid of most of the night sittings, will probably improve the quality of debate around here. When we improve the quality of debate, we lift the level of interest that each and every one of us has in being here.

I don't want to say there's any place I'd rather be tonight, but I can tell you there probably is. I'd rather be home tonight with my family. They haven't seen me in a number of days. It's been a busy number of days for all of us over this last weekend, but I'm here and I'm happy to be here. This is part of my job. I'm fulfilling my duties to be here. But I'll tell you, for my family tonight, it would be a lot better for the Duguid household to be together. They didn't get a chance to see me all weekend long—maybe they're lucky they didn't get a chance to see me all weekend long; maybe they're as happy as all of you are to be spending this evening here with me. But I would suggest that they probably would rather have me home tonight.

That's the nature of our job, and we accept it. We do the work we're expected to do. I think we would have a better quality of life, when we talk about family life, if we were to do away with some of these night sittings, if we were to start earlier in the morning. I don't think it's asking too much of any member to be here for 9 o'clock in the morning to begin routine proceedings, to begin our day. I don't think that's asking too much.

Most people out there, if they hear us debating this, are going to say, "How can you possibly be debating that?" Almost every resident across Toronto and around Ontario has to get up and get to work. Most workers have to be at work at that time. In fact, 9 o'clock is late for probably half the workers we have in our society in this province. So I don't think it's too much to ask members of provincial Parliament to do what we ask of workers right across this province, and that's to come to work a little earlier in the morning.

I'm not suggesting that members don't do anything in the morning, that all members do is sleep in and come here in the 1:30 when the traditional routine proceedings take place. I know that's not the case. Most members work a full morning, but I don't think it makes too much difference whether we're working here in this Legislature, in our offices or in our communities in the morning. I think there's plenty of room for flexibility in terms of members to adjust their schedules.

This early question period start: You'd think we were doing away with question period by the response from the opposition in some of these debates and in some of the question periods we've heard in the last little while. Question period is question period. This government will

be held accountable at 10:45 in the morning as much as it will be held accountable if we have question period starting around 1 o'clock, 1:30, 2 o'clock or 2:30. Either way, the opposition have one of the longest question periods known in all Parliaments around the world.

Interjection: The longest.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The longest.

Our cabinet and our Premier, like previous cabinets and Premiers in previous governments, are quite willing to hold ourselves accountable to the opposition. It's part of what we do. I think it's one of the beauties of our parliamentary system, frankly, that the opposition can get up when the House is sitting and ask us a question every single day, ask us anything they want on any issue. It certainly keeps us, as ministers, on our toes. We'd better make sure we know what our files are when they do ask us those questions. I think it keeps us sharp as a government, and whether we're going through questions at 10:45 in the morning or in the afternoon, I don't think it's going to make a difference one way or the other; in fact, I know it won't a difference.

I have worked at other levels of government: I've worked in the House of Commons; I was a city of Toronto councillor for a long time. The debate revolves around the quality of the issues and the quality of the people engaged in the debate. Whether we're having that debate in the morning or the afternoon, whether we're having question period at 10:45 in the morning or in the afternoon, I really don't get how that is going to make that big a difference at all.

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We're going to see a 50% increase—this is something that's really significant—in private members' business. That's something that should be important for each and every member of this Legislature. Some of the greatest moments in the last session in this place occurred during the private members' sessions. I think back to some of the bills that were brought forward that did pass and did receive support from all sides of the House. I remember the member for Brant's anaphylactic shock bill—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Now law.

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's now law. It passed in private members' business. That helps provide protection for our kids in schools, ensuring that schools right across this province have programs to ensure the very health and safety—and potentially save the lives—of many of our young people. You can't tell me that's not an important bill. You can't tell me that wasn't good, quality private members' time. You can't tell me that increasing the amount of private members' time by 50% is not going to be a good thing for each and every member of this Legislature.

I think back to our former colleague Ernie Parsons and the effort he went to, and the bill that he brought forward—I believe he called it Sandy's Law—on fetal spectrum alcohol syndrome. All members of this House were very touched that day. It was a wonderful moment in this Legislature when Mr. Parsons brought that forward. It's a bill that is making a difference on an issue that was important not only to Mr. Parsons, but to people right across this province and probably every member of this Legislature. I think we make very good use, for the most part, of private members' time, and that's why a 50% increase is good for this Legislature. It's something that we all should be in support of.

Change is difficult, but as the member for Mississauga–Brampton South said, change can be stimulating. Look at the changes that have taken place in terms of the way we debate over the last 10, 15, 20 years. With the advent of the computer, we no longer have written notes; we now write our notes on our laptops or write our notes on our computers, and we bring them home. They're typed and much easier to read. We have our BlackBerries, and we do use them in this place. We can communicate outside of this place, check our correspondence; we can do all kinds of things. Our job is changing; technology is changing our job. Surely shifting around the hours of work here is not that big a deal that we should be spending this much time.

It's funny—and I think it's indicative of not just this place; I'm not blaming the opposition—I think it's indicative of human nature that when politicians talk about something that personally affects them, it seems to take precedence over everything else. I remember my days on council when we talked about salary increases. That was a good two- or three-day debate. When we talked about shifting around committees or shifting around procedures, that was good for two or three days of debate down at council, and I guess it's the same here. When we're talking about ourselves, it seems to consume us.

I don't think this is a debate that should be taking place too much longer. I think this is an issue that brings positive changes to the way we do business here. I think it's reasonable.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Let's give it a try.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member for Mississauga–Streetsville said, "Let's give it a try." That's all we're doing. This is a trial; it's a pilot. Give it a try. The members opposite have said to send it to committee. We're going to do that. But we're going to give it a try, see how it works, and then it will go to a standing committee, like this government has with almost everything we've done. We've been very democratic when it comes to our legislation. It will go to a standing committee, and it will be looked at, and I'm sure there will be good recommendations brought forward. And if it's in the public interest and it works, great. If there are problems with it, maybe it can be adjusted. We're not afraid of change. I'm not sure why the opposition would be afraid to try this. That boggles my mind. I really think this is an opportunity to make life better and improve family life for many of us. I think it's something that's worth trying. It's something that I'm proud to support and look forward to supporting. Let's give it a try.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Actually, I'm not very pleased to speak on this motion, because I'm not very happy with it. To put it in rural terms, maybe the minister can drive for a while and it's my turn to spread.

Some of the things he spoke about amount to a little bit less than bovine excrement, and I have to tell you that realistically, the people don't give a water retaining device's care about this at all.

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: What he just said was not parliamentary language.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank you for the comment, member for Eglinton–Lawrence, and remind members to please keep in mind the decorum of the House in their remarks.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: It really upset me to listen to the Premier answering the question, when he specifically spoke about having no problem with his members starting work at 9 o'clock in the morning. Quite frankly, I took offence at that, because I don't view myself as any different from any other member in this Legislature, and many of these days we're starting far earlier than 9 o'clock, as mentioned by the third party. This Thursday, I am going to be starting at 4:30 a.m., and my night on that day will probably end at about 11 o'clock, and I'm no different than any other member in this Legislature. We put a lot of hours into this, and to say we're going to start work only creates a mindset within the public and the media that—guess what?—we don't work unless we're sitting in the Legislature. That's far from the truth.

The number of hours we put in here last week was close to 25 and a half. I would ask the Speaker, if that's the only time members are working, how many hours was the Premier in the House? We're not allowed to comment on the number of hours, but I would ask the public, or their own members, to talk about how many hours, realistically, the Premier was working in this Legislature.

I took offence both at that and at the comments the minister just made that, "We don't have a problem starting." Any other member in this House is working far more than what takes place in this Legislature. That's all part of the job, and we expect that.

As I said, I'm no different. I have two young sons, 11 and 12 years old. On September 27, 1995, my wife sat in that gallery up there and went into labour, and my first son was born. My kids know absolutely nothing different from what has taken place in my life in this Legislature. I move my whole life around what takes place here.

Now, who is it going to benefit what is taking place? You've got to look at the members it is going to benefit. For those of us who drive in each and every day, as I believe you do, Madam Speaker, it's going to take that much more time, because when we get home, we're working in the riding, doing events. Let me see: Tomorrow night, I am working with the volunteer awards; the night after that, I'm working with the Provincial Volunteer Awards, at the South Oshawa Community Centre; on another night, the chamber of commerce. There won't be one night when I'm done at 11, and that goes for this Saturday and Sunday as well. This Sunday, I expect to see all members out at their Battle of the Atlantic ceremonies, celebrating with their naval associations. Saturday night is another awards night—that's no different. To try to come in here and put this in the perspective that people watching would say, "The only time they work is in here," just degrades us to the point where it really bothers me, but I want to get to some other aspects.

Each party that comes in makes rule changes, and we were just as bad. When we came in, as the member who spoke earlier would remember, the only time the Legislature sat in the evenings was during the last two weeks, and we were allowed to sit until midnight. We set a heavy agenda at that time, so we changed the rules to allow us to sit every single night. Not only that, but there was another rule change that was extremely significant, and that was allowing for the introduction of bills and debate. You see, at that time you couldn't introduce a bill and debate it during those last two weeks. We changed that in order to help fill our agenda. I don't think that was the right thing to do.

Every government comes in and makes changes. One of the other significant changes that I was opposed to is the way it is now—you look up and see the clock; there's 15:54 left—and that is the allocation of time. People watching this wouldn't know that. The first speaker gets an hour; after that, there are 20-minute speeches; and then, after a certain period of time, there are 10-minute speeches. The debate is not so much about the content or the importance of the issue anymore; it's about who can fill the clock. Who's got 20 minutes to speak on this?

I would suggest, if you want to make that change, that the thing to do would be to take that first hour, and if they only want to use 45 minutes and save 15 minutes, add that to the next speaker. If they want to speak for 35 minutes, then you would have that person speak for 35 minutes. If they only use five of their 20 minutes, then you could add that 15 minutes, so that the next person could speak for 50 minutes, and add up that way. That would change the context of debate, so that you're actually speaking about issues, not filling time and clocks. That's one of the big concerns. It would certainly help.

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There are a number of other issues. For example, there's a perception—and I have to say that I haven't had a problem with the Speakers in the chair. I think that the Speaker's role or establishment should change, such that once the Speaker has been elected by the Legislature it is very much like another British parliamentary system, whereby nobody can run against that individual in the next provincial election.

The reason for that is that there is a perception, whether it is right or wrong, that the Speaker is siding with one particular party, and that's the party that they come from. It doesn't matter if it's our party or their party. There is a perception out there, and we sit in our caucuses behind closed doors saying, "It's not fair," "This isn't right," and "That's not right." You can remove that from the Speaker by eliminating the party affiliation, because that person would not have anybody running against them the next time. Those are some of the things.

Interjection.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Well, that was from a former Speaker; he would certainly appreciate that.

Then they'd have to be re-elected by the Legislature the next time as the Speaker, in order to give some impartiality to the individuals.

I would have hoped there would be an all-party discussion on this. I have to tell you, we heard about some of the other Premiers, and it was the first Premier that I had the privilege and honour to serve with, Mike Harris, who did one of the things that I think would be very beneficial to this Legislature. That was an all-party committee that was established; it was the alternative fuels committee.

As I look around, I'll try to see if there are any members who participated in it. It was outside the guidelines of the current committees out there, and it was reaching out. It included the opposition parties in an immense way that gave them the opportunity for input on such an important thing, which was the fuels—it doesn't matter if it was solar power, wind power, gasoline fuels or those other areas. It gave an all-party agreement, and it gave much more outreach. More importantly, it allowed for more authority and input by the opposition parties.

That would be one of the great ways that this Legislature could establish and move forward with some things. We have some very serious issues out there that could be discussed in all-party committees, and I know that there was an attempt in the previous government to move forward with one, but it didn't come to be.

First of all, why are we moving forward with this? Is it a requirement that we need more hours? Is it going to be more time on the clock that we're going to have to fill, and who can fill these time slots? No, we have to find out the real reason. I do have some concerns, and quite frankly, I'm the morning person in my household. What this means to me is that I drive home and back and forth, and although I have an apartment allowance, I've never used it in my entire time of coming to Queen's Park, because I try to spend my time with my family.

It was a former Premier here, Mike Harris, who said that it would always be family first, constituency second, and all other responsibilities after that. That's what you should focus on; all members should. Because, quite frankly, at the end of the day when you're no longer here, you still have your family, and you need those individuals around you. You need to dedicate that time, and any way that we can move forward to make it a family-friendly place would certainly be more beneficial.

So, for example, my understanding is that federal members can take their family members on committee hearings with them. We don't have that allowance here, nor would the public understand why they would or should allow that. If you want to move forward with the family-friendly, I don't necessarily believe that these changes will assist in moving forward with that, particularly from my own perspective and that of other members who drive in on a local basis—or for those who come in from long distances on Monday morning, that will now eat up a Sunday evening, as opposed to Monday morning travel to come in.

You're also going to get committee time and House time taking place at the same time. I don't know how beneficial that's going to be, because members will be running back and forth and trying to fill time spots. If you have to speak on a bill and you're in committee, it's tough to be in two places at one time. The structure of Queen's Park and the committee set-up has been around for a long time, to try to accommodate members and try to move forward with a number of other ways.

I don't know how this is going to be family-friendly, particularly for those individuals who come in from out of town. So they're going to have no evening sittings, and that's the guise under which we're told it's supposed to be. Well, those members who are coming in, I don't know how many members bring their families down to stay in Toronto when they're here, when they have to be in school and in other aspects. I don't really see this happening. I don't know if any of the members here actually bring their family members down to be at Queen's Park. So how does that free up time?

Those individuals who drive back to their ridings, as the speaker just previous to me mentioned, are at home doing events in their ridings, because they're more accessible, and they're there on a regular basis, which is part of—we understand that's taking place, and how do we do that?

I don't know where this perception of family-friendly has come in to free up the evenings, because I don't see it as happening. One, the members who come in will have to come in earlier, on a Sunday night as opposed to a Monday morning. Two, they're not there with their families unless they can leave early, not be around and be back at their home with their families. And those individuals who drive back and forth will end up working, as we all do, in the evenings and on weekends to try to fill the demands.

Realistically, as an MPP, the demands are everywhere. I can remember some of the things that have taken place. It doesn't matter where it is, there's somebody always asking for some help. You try to do that, because that's your job. You get in to make a difference with the community, with the families, with the people who surround you, to try to make a change. It's not so much that you go to events to be recognized as the speaker or at the head table. The reason that we go to events is accessibility. Those individuals at the events in the evenings don't realistically have the time to come in and see you through the week, or to come to Queen's Park when the House is in session, to try and be here with you. So you're out there with your community, trying to outreach to those individuals, at all times. That's part of the job, and we all accept that. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that. I don't know realistically, for one, how the additional hours are going to help.

Another thing: the 50% more private members' business. There were only two government members that the former speaker spoke about where their bills had actually

passed in private members' business. There may be others, but I would have liked the opportunity to have heard about some of the other ones, some of the non-government members' bills that got put forward.

The private members aspect is more than just the expectation in regard to the third party member, who spoke realistically about passing. It's not always about passing a piece of legislation; it's about raising the profile of a very key issue that needs to be addressed by the province. When a government is out there and the Legislature is debating specific issues that are being brought forward, private members' business is an opportunity to raise the profile of an issue that needs to be addressed, with the potential expectation that it may pass, but realistically, the hope is that you've raised the profile of an issue enough so that, in the event that the government is addressing an all-government or an omnibus bill, they may be able to include a clause that will address an issue that hasn't been addressed before.

I don't necessarily know about the 50% more private members' time, with the expectation of passing—unless they change the structure. Most people wouldn't realize that after second reading, if it passes, the bill then becomes the property of the government. Correct, Clerk? To get it to third reading, it's up to the government to call that. Why not allow it to then become not the property of the government, so that there is third reading debate, so that extra 50% of air time is allowed to be used to debate the third reading of some debates? At that time, the government can decide whether they're going to support it or not support it, or not give it royal assent, which may take away from it. But it's more opportunity and better discussion with more potential input there.

I do have some concerns. Realistically, I look at the time and the guise of family-friendly; I don't see how that's going to change. But passing the bill in two days—is that one of the issues? I don't see a large legislative calendar or a large number of issues that are being brought forward to be debated, so I don't know why it's being changed. We talk about parliamentary tradition, and we've changed that tradition. From my perspective, it wasn't something that I didn't agree with, although I'm told it's supposed to benefit the current sitting members when you go to a fixed election date so that you can plan and you have it all laid out prior to that. Even when I had the privilege and honour to be in the cabinet, I had no idea until the day the election was called that that election was being called. It was something you would try to prepare for, but you could never really guess. Now it's a fixed date, so it has gone to a more American system. I think some of the changes, although I don't necessarily believe this one is—we've made some changes that I don't think are necessarily in the best interests of all.

I think we need to look at how we can move forward. I was hoping for an all-party committee to try and get some input on that. If there was an opportunity, some of the suggestions I made, such as the Speaker, the other one such as the amount of time to be speaking, to revert back to—it was simple. It was the standing orders. You couldn't sit until it was the last two weeks of the session and you were able to sit until midnight. Those were some of the key things that I wanted to bring out. I'm sure there are many more.

I got a little wound up because I really take offence at the fact that there's a perception—and projecting that perception—that members only work when the House is in session. Unless people start to know you and really realize the work—I don't think I'm any different than any other member in this Legislature. We're dedicated, committed, and we're here to make a change and stand up for what we believe in.

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I'm just going to take a quick check here. I think that the family-friendly aspect is not really there, the number of hours, the journalists, the authorities coming forward—yes, change can be necessary, and yes, change is good, but I don't necessarily think that all change is going to be. What it is, it's trial and error in some cases.

The one thing that I would ask is whether any member in the House right now, for those who are here, can tell me what the motto of the legislative crest or assembly is and what it says in Latin. Is there anybody there now who can tell me what it says? Probably not. Just to inform the members, very clearly—and it's very distinctive and has a large impact—it's, "Listen to the other side". That what the crest and the emblem says in Latin.

What is taking place is the same thing that takes place—I can't remember if it was Mr. Bradley or Mr. Sterling who mentioned that every government that comes in makes these changes, and when a new government comes in, they don't revert back, because they quickly forget what it's like to be on the other side in opposition.

If the government members sat back and looked and recalled what it was like to be in opposition and what they felt their role was, what would they do to change that? Because what goes around comes around, and I am not one to stand up. I just take it as a privilege and honour to be elected every time. I appreciate the opportunity but I don't necessarily believe this is going to be in the best interests of the province of Ontario.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I must say, I have been quite amazed by this whole debate that we're having—this whole process of changing the standing orders.

People around this room have talked about the reality of what's on the table, what's before us. Initially, it was entirely a question of being family-friendly. The member from Nepean–Carleton, Ms. MacLeod, made some very good points about the way this place is structured and how it actually limited and constrained the ability of those with young families to function fully, and to function the way they should be able to in a modern 21st-century workplace. In fact, she made some good points. What happened here, in this chamber with this government, is that those points were used to cover for an extraordinarily substantial rewrite of the standing orders.

For those of you who are out there watching this on television, those of you who may have insomnia right

now, you should know that the standing orders govern how we work in here. It may not seem like a lot, but I have to tell you, I used to be on Toronto city council and it was astounding to me when I found out that a change from "and" to "or" dramatically rewrote the substance of a motion. There was one time when we were having a debate about privatizing part of the St. Lawrence Market, and I was able to get an "and" changed to "or" in a third sub-amendment that gutted the privatization, to the shock and horror of all those who voted for the final motion before council. So when we deal with standing orders, we talk about the ability of this place to actually be relevant to your lives and to deliver to you the accountability that you vote for when you go into that voting booth.

I want to strip away all the other arguments; I'll come back to them. But I want to go straight to the question of the question period itself. Because people out there, and you, Madam Speaker, know that question period is the point in the day, the point in the political cycle, when the government is at its most vulnerable. Right now in this chamber, those assembled here are speaking within a very strict format. We get a chance to speak, we make our arguments, we turn to each other, and we try to convince. In the end, orders have been given, and members vote pretty much the way their parties tell them to vote. But in question period, it's like quantum mechanics; all is unpredictable. Now, there's a reason they call it question period and not answer period. Rarely, in my short career here—a little over two years—have I actually seen a question answered with an answer. But on occasion, one finds, by asking a question of the Premier or of a minister, that the Premier or that minister can no longer keep up the façade of a policy that has changed.

I was here when the Minister of Energy had to admit that no longer could they keep the promise, the façade, that they were going to close down the coal plants in this province. It was interesting to watch the media gallery up here, because they knew exactly what was happening, even though there was never a direct answer from that side of the room.

Question period is the time at which the government is most exposed, the time at which random and unpredictable events can shape—and shake—careers, and we today are debating a process by which this government is going to take that point of vulnerability and try to bury it, move it in the news cycle so that it's before noon, move it so that the chances of recovering from a mistake, recovering from a slip-up, are dramatically increased. So if things go wrong at 11:30 in the morning, if a minister says something that, boy, they want buried, then everyone in this chamber knows that that afternoon something will be announced to fill up the news space so that it's all dealt with for the evening news cycle, or if not all dealt with, at least covered quite significantly. That's what this is about. That's what these standing orders changes are about.

It isn't, as the Minister of Labour said, a question of this side being averse to change. Everyone looks at change. But it isn't a question of changing things so that question period is in fact sharper. It isn't a question of changing things so that those who reside outside Toronto and outside the GTA are going to find it easier, because the changes that have been made will in fact make it more difficult for those families who will have a member leave home on Sunday afternoon, and not Monday morning. So it's less family-friendly.

Let's go back to question period. There were three things that I learned on city council—well, there were more than three, but three always stuck with me. First, never ask a question you don't have the answer to, because sometimes unpleasant things happen. Secondly, always read the report first. There were a number of times when my colleagues and I found ourselves asking questions that were answered in the report, so I learned that one. The third is, be careful what you ask for—be very careful what you ask for—because as you know, Madam Speaker, the process of election is unpredictable. Parties get elected that no one expected to get elected; governments fall that everyone thought were rock solid. There's nothing God-given that keeps this group of people on this side of the aisle and that group of people on that side.

Something I argued when I was a councillor, when my group was in a stronger position and the others were in a weaker position, and vice versa, was that in the next election, no one knew with any certainty who was going to be leading things. So if this government asks for a substantial weakening, a burying, of the ability of the opposition to actually hold the government to account, then a number of them may well survive the next election to be on this side and find that their tools to hold government to account are dramatically weakened. That matters in a democracy.

I don't care what your political perspective is; there will be times when governments do things that will make you crazy and that you believe, for good reason or ill, will have a detrimental impact on the future of this community that we call Ontario. And you will want to have the instruments to hold that government to account, to prove—not just assert, but prove—in the face of withering criticism and tough, tough questioning that what has been brought forward is actually useful.

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In some ways, what we have here—I know that when I go out and talk to people, they say "Why don't you work together?" Sometimes we do. But the reality of this chamber is that ideas are put forward and they are subjected to boiling water, they are subjected to acid and they are put through the wringer. At times that chemistry of acid and hot water, of tough questioning—sometimes not even tough questioning, but emotionally effective questioning—determines whether they're strong or weak. It's the tradition of our courts, where you have a defendant, where you have a plaintiff, where ideas are put forward on the stage, put forward before a judge and where they are thought through—and in this place as well. When you make sure that the government's position is increasingly unassailable, is increasingly one where

they can manipulate the media cycle, then you do a disservice to the people of this province.

There are a few ministers who may be concerned about this or a few backbenchers who are concerned about this, but I say to everyone in this chamber, whether you're in opposition or in government, what's being done is a disservice to the democracy of this province—very much a disservice. It was pointed out that this government is going to be asking for time allocation on this motion, which is extraordinary to me. Not only are you rewriting the rules of this democracy within this chamber to weaken debate and weaken the whole process of questioning and critical analysis, but you're going to limit the debate as well. Family-friendly? Pro democracy? No.

Mr. Kormos, the member for Welland, spoke about the Minister of Transportation, the member for St. Catharines, and his comments in 1997 about rule changes. I wasn't here. I was out doing other stuff. But Mr. Bradley had a very interesting line of argument: Changes are not made to make this chamber better; changes are made to strengthen the hand of government. Mr. Bradley was entirely correct.

It's suggested that these will be temporary changes. Are you kidding? I have to tell you—no, I can't say that, because it wouldn't be parliamentary. But I have to tell you that if you think changes that are extraordinarily convenient to a government in delivering its agenda are going to be temporary and chucked out mid-summer, then you didn't go through the same education system that I went through. It's a very simple process.

Do you believe this stuff? Have you gotten beyond pixie dust? Because if you have, you don't believe that these changes will be temporary if they're useful to the government. If they're a disaster for the government, I have no doubt in my mind that we'll be debating them again. But if they're really convenient, if they're really effective, if they bury stories that would embarrass this government, then they're in. The next government, whoever it is, because it's so tempting—if you are in government, you have the ring and you get to do what you want. It's very tempting to just keep on going that way.

No one in the general public out there and no one in this House should be confused about what's going on. To take that and bring in time allocation is quite extraordinary. You're doing something that's undemocratic and then you're jamming it through. In the end, there are only so many members of the opposition. In the end, you can probably talk this out. But to have to rely on time allocation for this should be written up. I doubt that it will be written up. People should be aware that a weakening of democracy is being put in place with steps that, in and of themselves, are undemocratic.

We should all remember that there are big issues that will be before us in the next four years. The state of our economy is quite substantial. This government will have to be held to account for its management or non-management of the economy. You, out there in the general public, are going to have big questions if far more people start losing their jobs.

I was on a city council in the early 1990s during the recession and I have to tell you: big questions all the time about what city government was doing to protect the economy. You out there will want those questions to hit home with this government. It will be much more difficult for us to hit home when question period is buried.

We have big questions about the environment and about climate change. Ten months have passed since this Premier promised a climate change plan for this province. None exists. No allocation in the budget; no legislation that was talked about in terms of transparency and reporting—none of that. Yet if you look at the food price issue that's happening in the world, everyone talks about biofuels, but if you look at what has happened to the price of rice and its availability, one of the largest factors was the drought in Australia, one of the world's major rice producers, that is generally recognized as being tied to climate change and that has led to food riots in Haiti and sub-Saharan Africa. That issue will be on the front burner as the world gets hotter and hotter. Our ability in this chamber to hold that government to account on that issue is diminished substantially by their efforts to manipulate and run the news cycle. That is of consequence for us.

It is unconscionable for this government to be running this approach. They have made a fundamental mistake in terms of protecting our democratic interests, and we on this side, for whatever reasons, are correct in opposing it. It doesn't matter what our motives are. In the end, if you want to have a democratic government that can be held to account, that can be subjected to the full glare of publicity, then this direction that has been taken by this government is the wrong one.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): It being almost 9:30 of the clock, I declare this House adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, April 29, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 2127.

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Tuesday 29 April 2008

Mardi 29 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 29 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 29 avril 2008

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EPILEPSY

Mr. Bill Murdoch: More than 300,000 Canadians live with epilepsy. This disorder has been around for millennia, yet many people suffering from epilepsy continue to live in the shadows. Epilepsy affects people of all ages and nationalities. It can strike at any age: childhood or adulthood. Seizures can come unannounced, triggered by startles such as a car horn sounding, a dog unexpectedly barking, or slipping on ice. In about 60% to 70% of cases, no specific cause of the seizure can be identified. In the remaining ones, the causes can range from genetic and birth injury to brain tumour.

Today, epilepsy surgery offers hope to people suffering from the disorder: the possibility of a reduction or elimination of the seizures. Others will outgrow it. Surgery may involve removal of the part of the brain where seizures originate or may involve making a cut to the nerve pathways in the brain. But there is no cure for epilepsy.

Epilepsy associations across Ontario and Canada for many years have been offering support to those living with epilepsy and their families and communities. They have also done a great job in helping to raise awareness about this condition and help people get out of the shadows. That is why I'm speaking about epilepsy awareness today.

March was Epilepsy Awareness Month and went unrecognized in this House, with the exception of the member for Timmins–James Bay, Mr. Gilles Bisson, who got up on a point of order on March 27 to recognize the international day of epilepsy. In closing, I would like to recognize the hundreds of volunteers who work in support centres and who have dedicated countless hours of their time and shown great fortitude to this cause.

ST. JOSEPH IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S CENTRE

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Last Friday, I had the opportunity to attend the grand opening of the St. Joseph Immigrant Women's Centre in my riding of Hamilton Mountain. This organization already has a facility open in downtown Hamilton, and they now have the opportunity to provide the same valuable resources to residents of Hamilton Mountain.

The St. Joseph Immigrant Women's Centre provides resources for newcomer women and their families to allow them every opportunity to succeed. Through this organization, women are given the opportunity to learn computer skills, driving skills, language skills and much more. This centre also provides support with housing, access to health care, immigration and other settlement needs.

Every person deserves the opportunity to succeed and be empowered. Providing newcomer women and their families with access to the resources that will help them realize their potential and dreams is an invaluable service. I am so proud to have a centre like this in Hamilton Mountain.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Miss Ines Rios, executive director of the St. Joseph Immigrant Women's Centre, and her dedicated staff for bringing this facility to Hamilton Mountain.

WOODSTOCK BUSINESS AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I recently had the pleasure of attending the Woodstock Business Awards of Excellence. This is an annual dinner put together by the Woodstock District Chamber of Commerce to recognize all the great businesses in Woodstock that are leading the way.

I want to commend the chamber for the work they do to assist local businesses, and to recognize the award winners, who really have demonstrated their excellence in so many ways, including long-standing members of our business community like Woodstock Camping Inc., and success stories like Cliff Zaluski of Sierra Construction, who has taken his company from a two-man shop to a major building company in our community, and organizations like the Woodstock soccer club, which built major infrastructure for the community.

The winner of the awards are companies and organizations that have gone above and beyond for their customers, for the environment and for the community—companies such as Oxford Archives Inc., VanParys Micacchi Shippey and Warnek LLP, the Longworth Funeral Home, A&W, Oxford Source for Sports, SixThirtyNine, and Mike's Electric.

The winners of the energy conservation and innovation award is a true Oxford success story: AB Products developed a system to heat their greenhouse using waste wood and reduced their energy consumption by 80%.

I want to congratulate the Woodstock chamber for putting together this great event and commend the very deserving award-winning companies of Woodstock.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the time to recognize these wonderful businesses.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: On behalf of the New Democrats, I want to acknowledge all the members of OPSECAAT and OPSEU who are here today and who for two long years have been fighting and spending a great deal of money and time to be given the right to bargain collectively. Because of that work, the promise to bargain collectively was given to them, it appears, by the Liberal government eight months ago, something that to date the McGuinty government has failed to deliver.

The United Nations' International Labour Organization stated unequivocally that there is no reason the basic rights of association and collective bargaining shouldn't also apply to part-time workers. The Supreme Court agreed that part-time college workers must be given the right to bargain collectively. In February, Kevin Whitaker, whom Mr. Milloy appointed to review the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, said that the right to bargain collectively should be extended immediately to these workers. I will be reintroducing today a private member's bill, An Act to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, which would allow part-time instructors to take part in collective bargaining and be treated fairly.

Roger Couvrette, president of OPSECAAT, and OPSEU, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, are here to tell the minister and this government that the time to act is now.

LOGAN TURNER

Mr. Bill Mauro: I rise today to recognize Thunder Bay's spelling bee champion Logan Turner, from my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Logan is a grade 6 student at Agnew H. Johnston Public School in my old neighbourhood and he won the regional spelling bee held at Lakehead University.

Not only that; he was asked to compete in this year's CanWest national spelling bee in Ottawa. Let me put this into perspective. In order to attend this national competition, Logan was selected as one of 22 finalists from an initial field of 225,000 students from across the country, an incredible accomplishment.

Needless to say, Logan had an impressive performance at this nationally televised event, making it into the sixth round until he was challenged with a very tricky word: succotash.

I don't know about you, but I think most of us in this House would have trouble spelling that one. It's the famous word Sylvester the Cat used. It's actually the native American word for a dish made of lima beans and corn.

Not only did Logan have an impressive national showing; I'm also told that Logan will attend the Scripps international spelling bee in Washington, D.C., to compete with nearly 300 of the top spellers from around the world.

This young man has a marvellous talent. He has made his family very proud, as well as his teacher, Megan Harri, and principal, Joy Petrick, and as one of Canada's top young spellers he has made Thunder Bay very proud. Even the Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, was asking me about this impressive young man.

Way to go, Logan Turner. Keep up the good work, and good luck to you in Washington next month.

1340

SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Last night the municipality of Merrickville-Wolford, located in the heartland of the Rideau system, received a report from Glencor Engineering that should set off alarm bells within the Ministry of the Environment. The report confirmed rapid deterioration of tanks in their sewage treatment plant, suggesting that contents are currently leaking into the ground surrounding the plant.

The report states unequivocally that the end of their useful life has been reached. The McGuinty government, despite the acknowledgment by its own Ministry of the Environment officials that the failure of the plant would result in major environmental problems, has consistently rejected the municipality's applications for funding support to replace the aging plant: five applications; five rejections.

Merrickville-Wolford Mayor Doug Struthers described the engineering report as "proof positive" that the situation of the sewage plant is critical, and that the municipality has not been crying wolf. This is more than playing politics; this is playing with fire. This is a high-risk gamble that could result in significant environmental damage to a UNESCO world heritage site: the Rideau River and canal system. I call on the government and the Minister of the Environment to do the right thing: Address this threat to the environment, and address it now.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Joe Dickson: The McGuinty government values the fact that today's post-secondary students are our future business and community leaders. We know that by investing in these institutions today, we're not only investing in the futures of those students, but in the province of Ontario.

Just recently, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities emphasized this by announcing a three-year, $60-million program to renew campus equipment for Ontario's colleges. With this funding, Ontario's 24 colleges will each receive funding for tools, books and equipment that they identified as priority items. This could include expenditures such as computers for

classroom use, specialized equipment or machinery for use in labs and classrooms, or new equipment to help accommodate students with disabilities. I'm quite pleased to learn that in my region, Durham College has received over $382,000 in the first year of this three-year funding.

The success of Ontario's colleges can't be denied. Over 90% of Ontario college students last year have already found employment. Further, in 2005, more than 59,000 students graduated from colleges in Ontario, up 37,000 per year from 10 years earlier. This government is proud of Ontario's colleges and what they have added and continue to add to the collective success of this province.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Mr. Phil McNeely: Since last week was Earth Week, and with this being Education Week, it only seems fitting to highlight what the McGuinty government is doing to include environmental education in our publicly funded education system.

One great example of this is a new optional grade 11 science course focused on the environment that is being piloted in nine schools across Ontario. The course teaches students about energy conservation, human health and natural resources, and it will also give students a chance to conduct a research project on a local environmental issue.

This government has also invested $3 million in funding this year to continue to implement the Bondar report, which will be used to help deliver environmental education in all subjects, in all grades.

We've also invested an additional $500,000 from the Ministry of Education, and nearly $300,000 over three years from the Ministry of the Environment in their community go green fund, to support and enhance the Ontario ecoschools program.

By the fall, the Ministry of Education will have developed an environmental education policy to ensure high-quality and relevant learning about this very important topic. By giving Ontario's children the opportunity to learn about our environment in school, we are ensuring that they have the tools they need to turn that knowledge into action and to help our environment.

EDUCATION WEEK

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: This week is Education Week in Ontario. We all have a role to play in the education of our children that goes beyond what we can do in this Legislature. Teachers, principals, support workers, community members and family members all play a crucial part in ensuring the success of Ontario's students. We've seen what kinds of amazing results can come when all of us work together to help our children succeed.

One great example of this is Pathways to Education, which was developed in the Regent Park Community Health Centre in 2001 here in Toronto. Pathways to Education works to reduce poverty by lowering dropout rates and increasing access to post-secondary education among disadvantaged youth. Last year, this government committed to provide $19 million over four years to expand the Pathways to Education program so that other communities in Ontario could achieve the same fantastic results. There are so many factors that foster the success of our students, from parents and family members who read with their kids at home in the evening, to ensuring that each child gets a nutritious breakfast so that he or she can be at their best.

It is also about the development of innovative programs that bring out the best in our students, and that's why I'm proud, in my community, of schools like John English and Norseman, which are part of the ecoschools program and are developing Ontario's environmental leaders. I also want to mention Lakeshore Collegiate and the work that they are doing and the leadership they are taking with respect to a smoke-free Ontario and the campaign to fight hunger and poverty.

It's by all of us working together that Ontario students will succeed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SENATORS' SELECTION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE CHOIX DES SÉNATEURS

Mr. Runciman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 67, An Act to provide for the election in Ontario of nominees for appointment to the Senate of Canada / Projet de loi 67, Loi prévoyant l'élection en Ontario de candidats à des nominations au Sénat du Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Very briefly, the purpose of the bill is to provide for the selection of nominees for appointment to the Senate by way of democratic election.

COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE DANS LES COLLÈGES

Mr. Marchese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act with respect to part-time staff / Projet de

loi 68, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la négociation collective dans les collèges à l'égard du personnel à temps partiel.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Under the present act, part-time workers are not included in bargaining units and have no right to bargain collectively with employers. My bill amends the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act to include part-time staff in staff bargaining units.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Hon. John Wilkinson: I stand today to talk about our government's innovation agenda, about Ontario's future, the kind of future that we want, the kind of future that we must seize together.

Ontario is being affected by changes beyond our control, changes that are hurting our traditional manufacturing and resource sectors and the families who rely upon them for their living.

Our government has responded with a five-point economic plan, a strategy for creating high-paying jobs today and well into the future. First, we're cutting taxes—the capital tax that business has told us to cut first. Second, we're making the largest investment ever in Ontario's infrastructure, some $60 billion over 10 years. Third, rather than trying to foresee the future, we're giving Ontarians the skills they need to reinvent it. Fourth, we're partnering with businesses in key sectors to secure high-paying jobs and ignite growth in the industries that will shape our future. And fifth, we are investing in innovation, tying it all together, which is the focus of my ministry and our eight-year, $3-billion investment.

1350

Our government has made innovation a key part of our economic strategy, because in this time of profound global change we must ask, "What sort of world—what sort of future—will we leave our children and our grandchildren?" Rather than simply react to change, we believe we can be a catalyst to help drive change for the benefit of future generations, to turn global change and global challenges into exciting new possibilities.

That's why we brought together 13 outstanding and accomplished individuals from both business and academia to form the Ontario Research and Innovation Council. This distinguished group advised the government on a strategy to keep our economy strong by cultivating Ontario's creative, cutting-edge ideas and transforming them into long-lasting economic advantages. In addition, we consulted nearly 400 of Ontario's innovation leaders: people who have started companies and made amazing discoveries, people who know first-hand the power of an idea put into action. These innovators told us that, to prosper, Ontario must leverage our existing strengths, identify key global opportunities and create the kind of environment that will drive innovation.

We listened and, based on their collective wisdom, we created the Ontario innovation agenda, which I was proud to launch today at the University of Ottawa. Through the agenda, we will focus on extracting value from excellence. Ontario is known for our world-class research talent. Recognizing the critical role research plays in innovation, our government's most recent budget reaffirmed our commitment to supporting discoveries through the Ontario research fund. In addition to maintaining Ontario's research capacity, we will find ways to make better use of this formidable brain power to solve the challenges that face Ontarians and humanity.

Innovators also told us that to succeed we have to focus where Ontario can compete globally. We will direct our investment toward areas at the intersection between research strengths, industrial capacity and market opportunities, including conquering disease through advanced health technologies and biopharmaceuticals, advancing and expanding the digital media universe through information and communication technologies, and sustaining humanity through the new bioeconomy and clean technologies.

To compete globally, we must also make full use of the skills and knowledge of Ontarians. Our approach has traditionally put an emphasis on developing research and technical skills, and we will continue to do so. But we will now equally support the development of business and commerce skills in this province—the entrepreneurial spirit that can quickly turn a great idea into a thriving business.

To support the growth of innovative businesses, we will improve the business climate for innovation. That means improved access to capital through initiatives like our Ontario venture capital fund. It means making it easier to start up an innovative company in Ontario. That is the rationale behind our proposed 10-year income tax exemption for new Ontario corporations that commercialize intellectual property originating in any Canadian college, university or research institution—and that is a North American first.

It means working across government to streamline regulation. Creating the right environment is crucial. This agenda is the Ontario government's commitment to act as a catalyst for innovation. An excellent example is the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, created by our government in 2005. The OICR is focusing on one of the most pressing health challenges facing Ontario and the world: the scourge of cancer. They are drawing on Ontario's considerable research excellence and the skills massed in our academic and research institutions.

Ontario has an international reputation of excellence in academic and hospital research. Biomedical research employs some 10,000 scientists and researchers, conducting some $850 million of research annually. Toronto is

the fourth-largest biomedical research centre in North America. The OICR has aligned these considerable strengths, helping to establish Ontario as a world leader in cancer research. Our government has been a catalyst, investing $347 million in OICR. We recognize the strategic opportunity that lies in integrating Ontario's world-class facilities and internationally recognized scientists to address the considerable challenge of preventing, treating and ultimately curing cancer.

In leading the fight to cure cancer, we are developing an answer to a significant global health challenge—an answer that will be in demand the world over. This is among the best examples of how we will extract value from excellence in this province. It is in recognition of this innovation and research excellence taking place here in Ontario that just today, at 8 a.m., OICR was named as the headquarters of the International Cancer Genome Consortium.

To give members an idea of the scale of this project, this project will create 25,000 times more data than the human cancer genome project. It is a recognition of our excellence that the secretariat, the headquarters, is here. It is one of the largest research consortiums in the history of the world. Moreover, I am particularly pleased to announce that my ministry has allocated an additional $10 million to OICR to support their additional role as the global data centre of the International Cancer Genome Consortium. Being the headquarters and the data centre of the human cancer genome project was able to drive much wealth creation to Boston and Massachusetts. I believe that our investments in the secretariat and the data centre will do the same thing for our capital city and the province of Ontario.

With the Ontario innovation agenda, we have charted a course to replicate the success of OICR in communities across Ontario. We are committed to be an effective partner for innovators across this province working at the speed of business—the speed of global business—as witnessed by our 45-day service guarantee for the Next Generation of Jobs.

Computing pioneer Alan Kay once said, "The best way to predict the future is to invent it." I think that captures the spirit of the Ontario innovation agenda. We will work with talented Ontarians to create the kind of prosperous future we all want for ourselves, for our children and for our grandchildren.

SOUTH ASIAN AND ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Hon. Michael Chan: For more than 100 years, Ontarians have benefited from the contribution of people from Asia. They come from India, China, Pakistan, Korea, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and they are vital to modern Ontario, socially, culturally and economically.

Two pieces of legislation have been passed here at Queen's Park to acknowledge the contribution of Asian Canadians: Asian Heritage Month and South Asian Heritage Month. Though the marking of the month of May is codified forever—and this is both symbolic and important—it only begins to portray the impact that people of Asian descent have on this province.

Asians comprise more than 12% of Ontario's population. When people from Asia first started coming to Canada and Ontario, they, like many other newcomers, contributed with their physical skills. They helped build a railroad from coast to coast. They worked in logging, construction and manufacturing. They helped to build this country.

Today that reality remains. Ontario needs tradespeople, medical and financial professionals, childcare workers and many, many other skills. As a province, we rely on newcomers to help provide those skills. In less than three years, by 2011, 100% of Ontario's net labour growth will come from newcomers.

We want these people to succeed. It is in our collective interest that they be able to apply these skills to Ontario. This is why we invest in their future and in Ontario's future with programs such as bridge training and language training. People from all over Asia have contributed their abilities, talents and cultures to this province for generations. We continue to benefit greatly from their contributions—people like Dr. Tak Mak, an internationally respected biomedical scientist, who is known for his discovery of the T cell receptor, or Rohinton Mistry, the internationally acclaimed author. A small part of that contribution can be experienced and celebrated during this month. Our province is built on, and continues to grow through, diversity.

This month is a time to encourage a deeper appreciation of the contributions of Asians to this province. Diversity is our greatest strength and our future. We must make the most of this precious asset to make the most of our prospects in the 21st century.

I invite all honourable members and all Ontarians to join us in celebrating this special month throughout the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

1400

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the official opposition to the statement by the Minister of Research and Innovation. There is no question that it is vital that we not only be a part of the research and innovation technologies available in this province but that we foster their development and work to ensure that we are ahead of the curve when it comes to that type of forward thinking. But let's not get in the way of the fact that once again we are hearing a reannouncement of something we've already heard on several different occasions from the McGuinty government.

The minister's announcement stresses the value of universities and colleges in research. Just this morning, I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of representatives from the Canadian federation of university

students in my office, and here is some of what they told me.

First of all, they stressed the fact that Ontario universities don't have office space, lab space or classroom space to handle the current demand for graduate and post-graduate students. Therefore, young people who are so eager to get into their areas of focus in research and innovation are being delayed from completing their studies and graduating. Let me quote from their report: "Ontario needs to expand graduate student spaces if we are going to promote our research capacity.... In addition, there are a record number of students seeking a limited number of spaces in graduate programs." My colleague from Simcoe–Grey and critic for training, colleges and universities has clearly pointed this fact out on numerous occasions. Minister, your government policies are holding back our province's most precious resource—our youth—and all from this so-called innovation agenda.

We certainly can't forget the fact that despite all the rosy pictures and aesthetically pleasing words that the members across the way are throwing at the hard-working people of Ontario, under the watch of Premier McGuinty, Ontario has lost over 200,000 manufacturing jobs. We've heard the stories just this week in the fact that General Motors in Oshawa will lose another 1,000 jobs; Dell in Ottawa has announced the loss of 1,100 jobs. These are both companies that have received incredible amounts of funding from this government and are still struggling.

Other than tossing money, there's obviously no plan across the way, despite the clever titles. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade stated today that she hopes GM may change their mind. We've heard of voodoo economics, but this minister believes in wishful thinking. Her plan is to hope GM changes its mind. And it's interesting to note that while the Minister of Research and Innovation was in Ottawa for this photo op, a staple in his riding in the town of Listowel, the Campbell's soup factory, announced it is shutting its doors and costing that community some 500 jobs. Who in their whole, entire life has ever heard of a job loss at Campbell's soup? Campbell's soup is closing.

If there's innovation to be quoted today, it may be the fact that this government has been innovative enough to find a way for Ontarians to lose over 200,000 manufacturing jobs. Those jobs continue to go at an alarming rate. Ontario is ranked ninth out of 10 by all five major chartered banks in Canada in terms of economic growth.

The jury is out on this government. Ontario is a first-rate province with so much going for it; it's time they had a first-rate government that is prepared to work and prepared to get our economy back on the right track.

SOUTH ASIAN AND ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Peter Shurman: South Asian and Asian Heritage Month is an appropriate way to recognize a range of people who now live as Ontarians, but, like so many, look to another part of the world as the place where their lives started and from which they draw their cultural backgrounds, now so generously contributed to the greater good here in Canada. I join with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in paying tribute to this richly diverse segment of our population, many of whom I delight in having as my constituents in Thornhill.

The definition of what people call South Asia varies somewhat, but the linguistic array tells the tale. Languages spoken in Ontario which find their origins in Asia include Indonesian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese, Maylay, Mandarin, Tamil, Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Tagalog, Cantonese, and many more.

I might say, however, that I find the recognition of South Asian and Asian Heritage Month somewhat disingenuous on the part of the McGuinty government because many of those included in today's ministerial recognition are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the member to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I withdraw.

Many of the people included in today's ministerial recognition are the very same people who in their small business enterprises are the target of this government in its lopsided application of the law. Today, in fact, we will be discussing convenience stores having to knuckle under, in line with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, while others escape enforcement because of who they are or where they sell their products.

While I applaud the minister for his inclusivity and also sincerely acknowledge South Asian and Asian Heritage Month, I, unlike the government, wish all our fellow citizens well and express the hope that all of them and all Ontarians can live under one equally applied set of rules, prosper through hard work and move our society forward with what all of these good people have brought to our shores as their special gifts to Ontario and Canada.

SOUTH ASIAN AND ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to rise in recognition of South Asian and Asian Heritage Month. There's no question that it is an honour for us here in Ontario that so many people from across Asia have decided to come to this country, to this province, to help us build our future.

Unfortunately, things have not always been harmonious. As many in this chamber are well aware, we have had the history in Canada of the head tax on Chinese Canadians. Many decades passed before an apology was proffered for that terrible exercise in racist policy-making. Some beginning has been taken on redress, but that is a blot on our history.

Ninety-three years ago come this May, the Komagata Maru, a Japanese ship chartered by people from British India who wished to come to Canada, came to Vancouver. They were excluded by Premier Borden's racist

Continuous Passage Act, and for two months they sat anchored outside Vancouver, on the point of starvation, finally driven back to British India, where a number were jailed and some were shot by the authorities. There is still not an apology to the South Asian community for that incident. Today, many things have changed. The Asian community has pushed hard for human rights, has stood up and won things that apply to all of us, and for that we should be grateful. But I think we still owe an apology for the Komagata Maru.

We need parties in the federal Parliament to defeat Bill C-50, which will bring in arbitrary measures to the immigration procedure that must be defeated by Canadians who value the diversity of this country.

In this province, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act was not adequate to deal with recognition of credentials. The full Thomson report had to be implemented. Those things are outstanding on the agenda and should be dealt with to fully honour people in this province who are of Asian descent.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to comment on the comments made by the Minister of Research and Innovation.

Towards the end of his speech, he had a quote from Alan Kay talking about the invention of the future, and perhaps I should remind the minister that there are other quotes that are equally applicable to what he had to say here today. One of the quotes that comes immediately to my mind is one by Harold A. Innes, the dean of history at the University of Toronto way back in 1936, in which he said that if an economist becomes certain of the solution to any problem, he can be equally certain that his solution is wrong.

I would invite the minister to ruminate on that, to think about it for just a few minutes, because he proposes to spend some $11 billion over a number of years in innovation. Now, we are not opposed to innovation. Innovation is a good thing. But he is going to be spending taxpayers' money and trying to tweak development in this province through the expenditure of that money. I would remind him that if he becomes that ingrained in his thought that this is the right solution, he can be equally sure that his solution is wrong.

I say that because I looked at what the minister had to say here today. He talked about how "Ontario is being affected by changes beyond our control." He immediately absolves himself and the government of the day of looking to things that can help the economy in ways other than innovation. He fails to mention that the province of Ontario can adopt an industrial hydro policy. He fails to mention that the province of Ontario can adopt a made-in-Ontario policy. He fails to mention that the province of Ontario can go the way of the manufacturing investment tax credit.

He goes on to talk about cutting taxes, the capital tax that businesses told us to cut. I'm sure they told you to cut those taxes; they all did, and you obliged only so well. In so doing, you also cut the taxes of the oil companies. You also cut the taxes of the major banks that are making billions of dollars in profit and laying people off at the same time.

He went on to talk about partnering with key business sectors, and I'm sure he has done that, too. We've seen the experience at Dell, where he invested $11 million only to see the people laid off. Yesterday, we read about the sad scenario in Oshawa, where millions of dollars have been spent only to see the layoff of an entire—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

1410

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg the indulgence of the House to allow the pages an opportunity to assemble for introduction.

I would ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages serving in the first session of the 39th Parliament: Jack Aloise, York–Simcoe; Sheilagh Brenegan, Burlington; Matthew Chaput, St. Catharines; Vanessa Chiarello, Nickel Belt; Jasdeep Dulku, Bramalea–Gore–Malton; Mikaela Henderson, Kingston and the Islands; Hannah Jansen, Huron–Bruce; Rafaël Lemmens–Chapdelaine, Toronto Centre; Isabelle Love, Guelph; Thomas Parker, Barrie; Emily Philp–Tsujiuchi, St. Paul's; Bilaal Rajan, Richmond Hill; Adam Russolo, Chatham–Kent–Essex; Arjun Sawhney, Mississauga–Erindale; Jillian Skinner, Markham–Unionville; Peter Smith, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock; Evelyn Steele, Sault Ste. Marie; Dario Toman, Etobicoke Centre; Naomi Turner, Kitchener–Conestoga; Cali van Bommel, Elgin–Middlesex–London; Joanna Wang, Scarborough–Agincourt; Matthew Wilson, Beaches–East York.

A warm welcome to our new group of pages.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Beaches–East York, we'd like to welcome Fraser Wilson in the west members' gallery, father of page Matthew Wilson.

On behalf of the member from Trinity–Spadina, we would like to welcome, in the west public gallery, Roger Couvrette of OPSECAAT and OPSEU members.

In the west public gallery, on behalf of page Hannah Jansen, her granny Nancy Millson and her mother, Val Millson.

On behalf of page Bilaal Rajan, in the east public gallery, Shamin Rajan, his mother. Welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Davenport, Captain Pedro Lauret of the Portuguese navy, and his wife and Mr. Carlos Morgadino, president of the Portuguese Cultural Association, in the east members' gallery.

In the east members' gallery, again on behalf of the member from Davenport, Georgina Bencsik, president of Youth in Motion, and Victoria Zeppa, a student. Welcome.

On behalf of the member from Mississauga–Erindale, in the east members' gallery, I'd like to welcome Ravi and Kiran Sawhney and Alisha Sawhney, parents and sister of page Arjun Sawhney, who is also the captain for the day.

Welcome to all of our guests.

ORAL QUESTIONS

NATIVE LAND DISPUTES

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier, and it has to do with our concern regarding escalating illegal acts under the guise of native protests and your tendency to look the other way or, on occasion, try to fob off responsibility.

We saw blockades in Deseronto this past weekend. In Caledonia, a blockade on the Highway 6 overpass was in place for four days and apparently just cleared today—clearly an illegal act that has nothing to do with the land claims.

In a scrum this morning, the Premier was asked about why he would continue to negotiate with lawbreakers, and he indicated he would refer the issue to the OPP for their advice. I have to ask the Premier, why would you want to throw off your responsibility, in terms of whether to negotiate with lawbreakers, to the OPP? Do you not appreciate your responsibilities?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I know all members of this House would agree that the work of the OPP over the course of the weekend was excellent. As Chief Commissioner Fantino stated, their job and their responsibility is to do their best to keep the peace. As the member said, in fact the Highway 6 bypass is cleared and being inspected by Ministry of Transportation officials. The blockade in Deseronto has been cleared for more than 36 hours. As well, the rail lines are cleared and the trains are running again. I think it's a real credit to the work of the OPP, who were able to keep the peace.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Given that response, all reasonable people can understand the frustration of Haldimand Mayor Marie Trainer when she says she doesn't know where to turn for help.

This government refuses to break off negotiations with lawbreakers. You provide electricity and water to an illegally occupied site. You fail to ask for a police investigation of what I think can be fairly described as extortion demands in the Brantford area, and you ignore illegal smoke shop operations that impact our kids. Minister, do you appreciate the damage you're doing to society and public order by sending this message?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I know the member knows and would want to acknowledge that on-reserve regulation of what Minister Clement refers to as manufacturers' compliance with federal tobacco control legislation is a matter for the federal government. I understand his point about off-reserve. I note, though, that the federal Minister of Health has said that undertaking on-site compliance activities—I guess regulation—on the Six Nations reserve—

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's Tony Clement.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Minister Tony Clement—within the current climate could expose Health Canada inspectors to risks and, for this reason, on-site inspections have been temporarily suspended. This is the federal Minister of Health saying it is the position of the federal government that, yes, there are in fact smoke shacks that are offside of the federal law, but no, the federal government will not intervene.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: If the minister wants to run federally, there's an election coming up.

I want to stress the collateral damage your government's apparent ambivalence toward lawlessness by certain individuals is having on children. We know the children of Caledonia have unfettered access to cheap and illegal cigarettes sold at a smoke shop located on provincially owned property only metres from a school. You're knowingly permitting the health of kids to be put at risk. In Deseronto, the public school was evacuated yesterday. It's closed today due to so-called "native protests." It's not known when the school will reopen.

Minister, your Neville Chamberlain approach to equal application of the rule of law is jeopardizing public safety in this province, with kids as part of the collateral damage. Do you even recognize that?

Hon. Michael Bryant: This is just the problem, that facts such as the member just stated are not in fact the case. The member ought to know, before he says it in question period, that the superintendent and staff at the said school are in the school today. It is not the case at all as the member described. In fact, the kids are going back to school.

I've been directing this through the chair, Mr. Speaker, and I'll say to you again that it's very important that members asking questions and the government giving answers need to provide the facts. I know the member wouldn't want to stir things up over there. What we want to do is try to keep the peace and that's what we'll continue to do.

1420

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: A question to the Premier regarding the state of Ontario's economy and continuing job losses: Yesterday we mentioned the distinction you held of being the Premier of the only province in Canada currently in recession. Today the Premier earned the distinction of putting Ontario into have-not status for the first time in 50 years, according to a report issued by TD today. Premier, you've taken Ontario from being a province that gives a hand up to one that soon will be taking handouts from the rest of Canada. Is that a legacy to be proud of?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question and I thank the folks at TD for introducing some important information into the debate here. One of the things my colleague opposite will want to note in the document which he's referencing is that Ontario found itself as an equalization-receiving recipient I think from 1977 to 1983. But the feds changed the formula, so we didn't receive any money.

From an Ontarian's perspective, I think there's a very simple question here. How is it that we can be a have-not if we're sending $20 billion annually to the rest of the country? I think that tells us something about the formula. Just one small example: Every year we receive $800 million less for our health care than Canadians do elsewhere. On a per capita basis, we're getting close to $1 billion less every year here in Ontario than we would get if we were living in other parts of the country. Again the question for Ontarians is, if we're a have-not province, why are we sending $20 billion every year to the rest of the country?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, that is a question to be pursued. I don't deny that. But the evidence of the sad state of Ontario's economy continues to fall at the Premier's feet.

Today we learned that 500 jobs will be cut at the Campbell's plant in Listowel. That's just devastating, as you can appreciate, to a small community. Yesterday we learned of almost 1,000 jobs lost at General Motors in Oshawa. The economic development minister's response to that was, "We hope GM will change its mind." Premier, when will you accept the reality that your taxing, spending and regulatory policies are doing serious damage to the economic well-being of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Nobody is questioning that these are in fact challenging economic times. There are some very difficult circumstances being faced by communities, including those just referenced by my colleague, and families directly affected by job loss. There's no doubt about that whatsoever.

But I think the last thing we should be doing to support those communities, to support those families, is to take $5 billion out of our revenues and make cuts to their health care and cuts to their education. I think that's the wrong way to go. Instead, we are continuing to ensure that those health care services and those educational programs remain.

And we're adding to them. Our most recent budget invested $1.5 billion into the skills and education of Ontario workers. We think the way for us to grow strong is not to look for oil and gas, because it's not there; we're going to have to find the strength in our people, as we traditionally have done, in the province of Ontario. That is why we will continue to invest in our people and continue to protect those public services on which they have to be able to depend.

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is also directed, as a supplementary, to the Premier. You're talking about the $1.5-million investment in jobs strategy. The question then becomes, in what jobs? I think the people of Ontario are sick and tired that you really don't have a plan, and the investors are now becoming rather cynical about it.

They've seen this movie before: $11 million by the McGuinty government invested in the technology industry with Dell computers. What have we seen just last week? Thanks to your investment with no plan, 1,100 jobs lost. General Motors was to receive $235 million. Again, what did we hear just yesterday? Almost 1,000 jobs lost.

Premier, these aren't just numbers; these are hard-earned tax dollars that have been squandered by your government. The job losses represent families that have lost confidence in you. What do you have to say to the families who've run out of listening to your vacuous promises?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to speak to any specific of any partnership we have entered into with any business in Ontario. Let's take Dell for a moment—something that happened in my hometown. Obviously we feel for those families that have been affected by this, but the money we invested through that partnership was directly into training for those workers. The good news is that the workers now have that training, it's now part of them, and they can take that with them elsewhere. That's not money that we gave for operating dollars or money that we gave for capital investment. We invested in skills for the workers there.

When it comes to monies we've invested by means of partnerships with the auto sector, each and every one of those investments has been strengthened by a contract. There are specific obligations to be met by the other side, and they've honoured those in each and every instance.

Perhaps my friend is saying that we should leave well enough alone and allow the economy to unfold as it is. We just don't see it that way. We think we've got a responsibility to find ways to partner with business, to partner with labour and to partner with workers to make sure that we grow stronger together.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Yesterday, General Motors announced the layoff of another 1,000 workers at the Oshawa truck plant. Just a couple of years ago, the McGuinty government, with much fanfare, announced an agreement whereby it gave General Motors in Oshawa $235 million of the people's money. Will the Premier admit that when he handed General Motors $235 million of the people's money, the McGuinty government failed to negotiate meaningful job guarantees for Oshawa workers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thought that you could count on the NDP at least to support us as we worked with the CAW and the auto sector in Ontario to invest in the expansion of the auto industry in our province.

I chatted yesterday, once again, with Buzz Hargrove. We talked about this particular issue. We talked about the new agreement they've entered into with Ford—which I

am sure is going to be a competitive force to be reckoned with—as we fight for more investment against the US.

But I can tell you that in each and every instance where we have invested and partnered with the auto sector, there are specific agreements and specific obligations that have to be honoured on the part of the industry, and they've done that. The fact of the matter is, the US economy continues to slow down. There's a lesser demand for the product that we've been making here, and that has had an impact on us. That's unfortunate, but we will continue to work with both the CAW and GM—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: A competent jobs strategy sets out guarantees and real penalties if an employer fails to keep those guarantees. Since that $235-million handout to General Motors, they announced layoffs of 1,200 in August and now a further 1,000. Two thousand workers are out the door without anything to look forward to. We saw a similar situation with Dell in Ottawa: Dell gets millions of dollars of public money and then lays off 1,200 workers. The question is this: Is the McGuinty government jobs plan really all about $235 million for General Motors while 2,000 workers get put out in the street?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think we should look at the net result of the efforts we've made on behalf of Ontarians in the last four years. We invested, through our automotive strategy fund, $500 million, and we landed $7.5 billion by way of new investment. For the first time, we are now the number one auto producer in North America. We've beat out Michigan now for four years in a row. We landed a new assembly plant with Toyota. Those are good jobs. Those are helping families, they're helping strengthen their communities and they're helping strengthen the quality of the public services that we continue to afford here in the province of Ontario.

Just recently, Ford has announced that they're looking for 500 new workers at their plant. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade tells me that we're about to build GM's first new hybrid truck in North America right here in Ontario. There have been some losses, but we continue to move forward together.

1430

Mr. Howard Hampton: I don't know how you can call the loss of 200,000 manufacturing jobs in Ontario "moving forward." By any measure, it is economic decline. The fact is this: There are competent ways to sustain jobs, but giving tens of millions of dollars to Dell and then watching them lay off 1,200 workers and giving $235 million to General Motors and watching them lay off 2,000 workers is not moving forward; it's more losses. Premier, how many more workers in Ontario will have to lose their jobs before the McGuinty government puts forward a real jobs strategy to help sustain jobs rather than lose jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think the single most important thing that we can do is to continue to invest in the skills and education of our workers. Our single greatest resource is not something in this province that is found beneath our feet; it's between our ears. That's why, in our most recent budget, we put forward a $1.5-billion new initiative investing in the skills and education of our workers. We've done something without precedent in the history of this country. We said that for 20,000 workers who've lost their jobs, here are—for the first time—long-term training opportunities. So if you lose your job in the forestry sector, for example, and you want to move over into the mining sector, we'll cover up to $28,000 in a two-year training program. That will include daycare, transportation, and potentially some housing costs.

We are working as hard as we can to get Ontarians back on their feet. I have every confidence that this economy is going to grow stronger because I have fundamental confidence in the strength, abilities, determination and entrepreneurialism of Ontarians.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: The 2,000 Oshawa workers who are out on the street are skilled workers. They are electricians. They are instrument mechanics. They are people who are used to working with computer-aided technology. These are skilled people.

But it's not just Oshawa. Further grim news in Listowel: Campbell Soups shutting down its plant and putting 500 people out on the street in a community of only 6,500 people.

My question is this: Will the Premier tell these workers and their families, "This too shall pass," or are we finally going to see a real strategy to sustain jobs from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have a strategy. It's a smart strategy, it's an effective strategy and it's one that we're going to continue to implement. It's just that the leader of the NDP doesn't like it.

Let me just revisit that strategy one more time. It's a five-point plan to grow this economy. First of all, we are cutting business taxes in an affordable and effective way. Secondly, we are continuing to invest in innovation so that we can turn our ideas into more jobs. We're also investing heavily in infrastructure. That creates jobs in the short term and enhances our productivity in the long term. We're also continuing to invest in strategic partnerships. That's how we landed the new jobs we have here in the auto sector.

Overall, this is working well. There are some challenges, no doubt about it, but we're ahead 450,000 net new jobs during the course of the past four and a half years. I'd love to be able to say that we're never going to lose a job, but I think, over the long term, we are certainly continuing to make real progress.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, jobs in Brantford, where you go to the call centre and you get sent out to a job for six weeks, or jobs at McDonald's or Tim Hortons are not the kinds of jobs that sustain families and communities. That is the problem.

Earlier today, TD Economics issued a special report indicating that Ontario will have to start accepting federal equalization payments in 2010 because of Ontario's economic decline.

Premier, there is still time to do something about this. We have suggested a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit to help manufacturers. We suggested a reasonable industrial hydro rate to help manufacturers. We have suggested a 50% Buy Ontario strategy, which has been very successful in the United States. Are you going to continue to stand by and watch thousands of good jobs disappear in Ontario or are you finally going to adopt a jobs strategy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll give the leader of the NDP one thing: He's certainly consistent when it comes to his manufacturing tax credit. But we've got something better: We have retroactively reduced and in some cases eliminated capital taxes. That means $190 million to be delivered very shortly to needy manufacturers.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: You voted against it.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The leader of the NDP voted against that—you'd think he'd want to do something that puts money in the hands of needy manufacturers and resource-based industries—yesterday.

I understand where he is coming from, but I just don't buy the delayed support that he would offer to the manufacturing and resource-based sectors. We instead prefer to reduce those capital taxes retroactively, to eliminate them in some cases. That will provide immediate support to our manufacturers, which is when they need it.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The banks and insurance companies cheer the reductions in the capital tax, but they have hundreds of millions of dollars of profits and hardly need a tax cut. Other provinces, such as Manitoba, have implemented a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit, and they are not losing manufacturing jobs the way Ontario is. Quebec has adopted the same strategy. Their economy is doing better than Ontario's on the jobs front, but the McGuinty government refuses to adopt these measures.

I ask again: How many thousands of Ontario workers will have to lose their jobs before the McGuinty government comes forward with a serious jobs strategy instead of simply giving handouts to corporations like General Motors?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague likes to make reference to what's happening in other parts of the country, and it's always important to pay attention. Not all comparisons are fair. They've got, in many cases, strong resource-based, commodity-based economies which are growing like gangbusters because of what's happening to oil and gas in international markets. But I think it's worthwhile taking a look at what Manitoba just recently did in their budget. I have a note here that says, "The hard-hit manufacturing sector will see its corporation capital tax wiped out this July—two years earlier than planned." It says, "The move is intended to help exporters deal with the rising loonie and weakened demand in the United States."

Well, we did it here first. Manitoba is adopting our approach. I can understand why they're doing that. What they've done implicitly in adopting our approach is rejecting the leader of the NDP's approach.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTES

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is for the Premier. Premier, on Sunday morning, my wife and I came upon a barricade. They were burning logs. There was a van across the road. I had a truck and a trailer. I couldn't back up. There were cars behind me. So I got out and chatted with this young couple. There were two young children with them eating ice cream cones. Barricades have become the new normal in the McGuinty Ontario, certainly where we were on old Highway 2 in Tyendinaga.

This has been going on for a year. Area people don't know who is in charge. We took the detour and got into Deseronto, and they don't even know who their MPP is in Deseronto. Premier—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member to refrain from personal attacks on any of our members. Thank you.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I do not mean to attack the Premier, but this barricade was in Minister Dombrowsky's riding. We don't hear from her. Have you directed your minister to hide? Have you directed your cabinet colleague to be unavailable from—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Isn't that just typical? Mr. Tory was saying, over the weekend, "I would not have people sitting at the table who show disrespect for the law." Well, apparently, he makes an exception for his caucus table, because just as the member is engaging in an inappropriate attack against the minister, Mr. Hillier, the member for Lanark, as we all know, distributed photos of a dead deer with bullet—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment, please. It sounds like Bert Johnson is in the room. I just remind all members on all sides that even if they're going to be quoting from a document, if it's an attack against another member, that is not something that is appropriate for this chamber. You can make your comments, but please don't be engaging in personal attacks against individual members. Thank you.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Absolutely, and that's why shooting a deer and naming it Leona is just wrong.

I think it's important here that we recognize that there are two approaches: one is to try to seek peace in the community and seek a resolution, and the other one is particularly divisive.

1440

Mr. Toby Barrett: On a positive note, local people do appreciate the OPP making arrests at Deseronto, and

as Commissioner Fantino stated in an April 25 news release: "This violent criminal activity occurred outside of any legitimate protest and will not be tolerated."

April 26, and I quote: "Those responsible for criminal activity will be held accountable."

But back in Caledonia, ATVs storm into town, barricades go up on the railway and provincial Highway 6, and all of this not because of the land claim, as you know, Minister Bryant, but to show solidarity with aboriginal protesters in eastern Ontario.

We know the people have got the barricades moved for now, but my concern is the double standard. Those responsible for criminal activity are arrested in Deseronto, and no reports of arrests in Caledonia. Why the double standard?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The allegation that the member seems to be making—and I know he wouldn't want to make this allegation—would be against the standard set by the very institution and the people who in fact engage in decisions of police operations. That is, as the member knows, the OPP.

The member congratulates the OPP for their work in Deseronto, but I would have thought the community was supportive as well of the work the OPP did in keeping the peace. They make decisions, operational decisions, in Deseronto. They make decisions, operational decisions, in Caledonia.

The member knows that it was a recommendation of the Ipperwash commission that those lines be clearly drawn between police operational decisions on the one hand and government decisions on the other hand. So I'm sure the member would not be encouraging us to direct the police.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last week in this House, the co-chair of the cabinet committee on poverty reduction, the Deputy Premier, said he did not know when public consultations for a poverty reduction plan might finally start. He said he would check with the lead minister. We haven't heard back from him yet, nor have we heard from the lead minister. Why won't this minister tell us when public consultations will finally start?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to tell you I'm delighted with the interest of the members opposite on this very important initiative to develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy for the province of Ontario, complete with measures and targets.

It's a tremendous opportunity to bring together the strength of government and the entire community and focus our attention on reducing poverty in this province. I can assure the member opposite that we have begun talking to people—as you are well aware—and I look forward to announcing the consultation in the very short next few days.

Mr. Michael Prue: When I listen to the minister speak, I am reminded of an old American proverb that goes something like this: "A secret is either too good to keep or too bad not to tell." I would guess it's probably the latter.

Yesterday a coalition of anti-poverty groups wrote to the minister. They too fear that consultations will be narrowly circumscribed. I fear, personally, that a website to seek thoughts on reducing poverty is about all that is going to be announced by this minister.

Why won't the minister tell Ontarians that the government is serious about poverty reduction by committing to province-wide consultations now?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me just reiterate how very excited I am about the prospects to develop, in consultation with the people of Ontario, a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. I'm sure the member opposite will be very anxious to hear exactly where we're going to be, and we'll let him know very soon.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is to the Minister of the Environment: The 2008 budget proposes $56 million to clean up a PCB storage site located in my community of London–Fanshawe.

Since this announcement, there have been a number of concerns raised by residents of my community. They are worried that this site has been a hazard to their health and the health of their families. They are concerned that when the government talks about doing a cleanup, it's because our land and water are contaminated by PCBs.

Why is the government committed to doing this cleanup now? Have the families in London–Fanshawe been at risk because of this storage site?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I appreciate the question from the member, because I know there have been some concerns expressed about that. He's quite correct that the budget included $56 million to destroy the PCBs that are contained in a secure storage site in London. The ministry established the Pottersburg PCB storage site in the 1980s to ensure the secure storage of these PCBs until they could be safely and cost-effectively destroyed. At the time, there was simply no practical way of destroying them. The creek and the contaminated soils were completely cleaned up of PCBs at that time. The PCBs have been in safe and secure storage ever since. There has been absolutely no risk to the community from this storage facility. We're going to remove the PCBs from the Pottersburg Creek storage site to ensure that they will never be released into the natural environment.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to hear that these materials have been safely and securely stored and that families in our community were not at risk.

I'm hearing other concerns from residents in my riding about this issue. They are asking why the ministry is proposing to remove the materials from the site to destroy them and whether this new activity at the site might cause any risk to the residents of London–Fanshawe. They want to know how this cleanup will happen. My community has many questions about this project. In

fact, there is a meeting in my community tomorrow night on this very topic. I want to ensure that my community gets all the answers and the information they need on this important issue.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I certainly compliment this member on being on top of this issue, and he has been for some time.

When the site was established back in the 1980s, the ministry made clear that the storage site was a temporary solution. And now, at this time, there are effective ways of destroying the PCB material and therefore we're taking action.

I can't tell you exactly what the process will be. The ministry will be putting out requests for proposals through an open and transparent process to determine the best way to get the work done. I can assure you and the other members that the PCBs at this site will be destroyed in a manner that is protective of human health and the environment.

Like you, I want to ensure that residents have all the information they're looking for. As a matter of fact, that's why the ministry is having a public meeting in co-operation with the local public health unit to provide information and answer questions from the community on May 9, next week. I would encourage everyone in the community who has any questions or is interested in this issue to attend that meeting.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is intended for the Minister of Health Promotion, but I will ask the Premier. Statistics show evidence of experimentation with tobacco was found in grade 5. By grade 7, 16% of students have smoked in their lifetime. By grade 11, 22% of students have smoked in their lifetime and more than half of those are smoking every day. These disturbing statistics are taken from a student health survey from the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit.

Premier, what do you have to say to the parents of the children who are subjected to the pressures of smoking from a vendor on crown land, just metres from their school?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: I know that my colleague the Minister of Health Promotion would wish that she was here to talk about some of the progress—

Interjections.

Hon. George Smitherman: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. The matter at hand raised by the honourable member about the necessity of government well supporting efforts to stop kids from taking up tobacco in the first place is a matter that we all take seriously in this House. But questions with respect to the role of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and the role of the official opposition in some supporting and many not supporting that initiative is a serious matter that must be raised. Through the initiatives, including a very aggressive marketing campaign, we've seen a marked reduction in the uptake of tobacco among younger people in the province of Ontario—evidence, I think, of progress in the act. But we agree with the honourable member overall about the necessity to continue to have strong government actions to reduce the likelihood that young people will take up smoking in the first place.

1450

Ms. Laurie Scott: I thank the minister for his response. He really doesn't address the question.

The Minister of Health Promotion states that "public health officials have visited 5,500 tobacco vendors" and are "distributing 30,000 educational kits to vendors across Ontario," but have any of those visits been to the vendor on Argyle Street in Caledonia? Have there been any educational kits provided to this vendor, or is this a double standard in the province of Ontario that the people on Argyle Street in Caledonia are treated differently?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think the honourable member would want to know that our partners in delivering these sorts of programs are of course the public health units across Ontario. The activities that they take on are very often guided by their own local awareness of the situation and the demographics in the particular area they're representing. But there is no doubt that alongside our initiative in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act has been to enhance the capacity of the public health units to proactively get out there and seek to enhance the quality of the battle against kids taking up tobacco in the first place. We accept the honourable member's encouragement that these initiatives should continue to be resourced and look for all opportunities to encourage young people in Ontario to think twice before taking up and addressing the devils of tobacco.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: For almost two weeks now, the McGuinty government has kept its quarterly IBI wait list numbers from coming to light. Finally, I obtained the latest quarterly numbers, and the shocking secret is finally out: There are now 1,511 children with autism languishing in Ontario. That's a 4.5% increase since the December figures came out. Why won't this government admit its dismal failure to provide services for children with autism and to get those wait lists down in Ontario? Why are they not serious about helping these families and these children?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me be really clear about this. The challenges faced by children with autism and their families are enormous. We have made tremendous progress, though, in providing services to these children, and we are continuing to aggressively improve services.

Let's just take a step back and think about this. Ten years ago, there were no IBI services for children with autism in this province—zero. Since we were elected in 2003, the number of children receiving IBI therapy has more than tripled. Actually, it's three and a half times the

number when we first took office. Our spending on IBI has more than tripled. We are supporting the entire family with respite services. The next step is going to be preparing our schools—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister knows that there's really no plan in place. Funding is being used right now to train administrators and to help principals make plans, but there are no additional services for children being provided.

Parents are worried. They're worried about a new benchmarking scheme that's going to be used to withdraw services from children. Parents are scared to death to send their children into schools, where they know the services aren't there for their kids.

Why won't the McGuinty government make good on its promise to provide the services that children with autism need and deserve? How much longer are you going to make them wait?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We know that in order for children with autism to be able to achieve, they need to get into the schools, into the mainstream, as quickly as possible. What we're doing is training those adults. The member opposite speaks disdainfully of training principals and training professionals in the schools, which makes no sense, because what we have to do is make sure that those educators have the training. We have put millions of dollars into summer training programs. That training is ongoing, not just for the administrators and teachers but also the educational assistants and the people who are working on the front lines with those children so that children can get the service they need when they need it, in the schools, in the classroom, so that parents can feel confident that their children will get the ability and the opportunity to achieve in a mainstream classroom.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. David Orazietti: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. My riding of Sault Ste. Marie is home to Sault College and Algoma University College, which offer quality programs to many rural and northern students.

Recently, Sault College opened a 195-seat video-conferencing and lecture theatre with the help of a $750,000 investment from our government. While the new multimedia centre will play a vital role in expanding distance education, many of these students travel long distances every day to attend classes because there is simply no closer alternative. Others who live on campus are unable to see their families for long periods of time because they cannot afford to travel home. Minister, can you tell me what our government is doing to help these students get to and from their classes?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the member for the question and acknowledge his great support for post-secondary education, especially in his own community with both Sault College and Algoma.

I just want to inform the member and the House that the government does recognize the unique challenges faced by individuals living in northern and rural ridings. In fact, studies have shown that living in an isolated point can be a deterrence to attending a post-secondary institution. That's why I was very proud that on April 10 this year, just several weeks ago, our Premier announced $27 million for a new distance grant to assist with transportation costs for approximately 24,000 students living in rural and remote areas. Students living at home and commuting more than 80 kilometres one way to a post-secondary institution because there is not one of the same type closer to home will be eligible for a $500 grant per school term. As well, students—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Orazietti: Thank you, Minister. That's great news for Ontario's students. Helping students attend their classes and make occasional trips home to their families will no doubt help ensure that more students have greater access to post-secondary education and stay in school. Initiatives like these will create more opportunities for students coming from rural and northern communities.

As more students choose Ontario's post-secondary educational institutions, the demands on our colleges and universities continue to increase. Can you tell us what else in addition we are doing to ensure that all of Ontario's students have access to an affordable, first-rate post-secondary education?

Hon. John Milloy: Unfortunately, with the time we're allotted to answer a question, we've done so much, I don't have enough time. So let me continue on the distance to say that students who go away to school because there's not one of the same type within 80 kilometres of their home will be eligible for a grant.

The initiative that was announced by the Premier builds on the Reaching Higher plan—$6.2 billion, one of the greatest investments in post-secondary education in this province's history. We're investing $1.5 billion of that in student assistance, helping 150,000 students per year. We've tripled the number of grants available to students, with one in four students in this province—approximately 120,000—receiving non-repayable grants. We've increased the operating funding for colleges and universities by 58% since 2003, and we are seeing those results with one of the highest participation rates in post-secondary education—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is intended for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, but I will ask the Premier. The description for the address is Plank Road at the intersection of provincial Highway 6 and

Argyle Street in Caledonia. On that crown-owned land there is currently a vendor who is operating a cigarette shop. As this is taxpayer-owned land and is therefore entrusted to your responsibility as the government, can you confirm if your minister responsible is collecting rent from this particular vendor, and if not, why not?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The minister responsible sent an eviction notice to the people operating on that land some weeks ago. The position of the federal government when asked a very similar question by the mayor of Caledonia was that at this time, said Minister Clement, they would not be inspecting.

It's interesting that we're having an opposition day motion on a smoke shack, but it's nonetheless an important debate, one that's taking place around contraband tobacco. I want to make it clear that I'm sure the member isn't suggesting that the government direct the OPP to go forth and kick down the door of that smoke shack. I'm sure the member isn't suggesting that.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's very interesting news that the government has sent an eviction notice. I wonder when the government sent the eviction notice to the vendor. But this was still an illegal operation. Why are there two-tier levels of enforcement in the province of Ontario? When did you send the eviction notice out, and why didn't you deal with it before?

1500

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, you're not going to get any disagreement here with respect to the government's position on contraband tobacco and on a smoke-free Ontario. But I note that when the president and CEO of CAMH, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, wrote a lengthy letter about the need for government to take prompt action on addressing contraband tobacco, it was a letter that was addressed to the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, because in fact, as the member knows, the contraband tobacco issue does, yes, involve contraband tobacco being sold on reserve, and the member will know that would be federal jurisdiction.

I'm sure that the member shows the same concern towards Conservative Minister Tony Clement and the Right Honourable Stephen Harper as is shown for the provincial government. Again, I look forward to further opposition debate this afternoon on this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The Ottawa Citizen asked the minister on Friday what training Dell employees received. He said he didn't know. The weekend has passed. Can the minister tell me how many weeks of training Dell employees received before the company took government money and skedaddled away?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very proud that our government entered into a partnership with Dell, which provided training for over 1,800 apprentices at Dell over a three-year period for three different apprenticeships. What it did is, it gave them the type of training which not only allowed them to work at Dell, but they were transferable skills that they could take elsewhere. I note, and I think the Minister of Finance noted last week, the number of employers in the Ottawa area who have said that the skills that they had were valuable, and they were the type of jobs that they could move into.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: An article that appeared in August 2005, in the Ottawa Citizen, stated that Dell computers only gave three weeks of training to their employees. In my view, that's not real apprenticeship. This government paid millions of dollars, $5,000 per employee per year, to a company that paid their workers wages of $25,000, in order to persuade them to set up shop in Ontario.

Now the company's gone, the workers are unemployed, and the minister doesn't even know how much training they've received. Based on this fiasco, will the minister make sure that apprenticeship tax credit money is going towards real training and that what happened with Dell won't happen to them again?

Hon. John Milloy: The information put forward by the member is quite frankly wrong. Each of the three trades required approximately 4,000 hours of both in-school and on-the-job training before successful individuals were awarded the certificate. Information technology support agent: 3,340 hours of on-the-job training—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: I cannot believe that they would belittle jobs of 1,800 people in Ottawa.

Information technology call centre inside sales agent: 3,730 hours of on-the-job training and 270 hours—nine weeks—of in-school training;

Information call centre customer care agent: 3,730 hours of on-the-job training and nine weeks of in-school training.

Let me quote David Weedmark, managing partner of AIM Group's IT services division: "I would say over the next couple of months"—the employees trained at Dell—"a third to a"—

Mr. Peter Kormos: No one is available at the moment; please hold.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the member for Welland—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member for Welland and the member for Trinity–Spadina. Thank you.

The member for Hamilton Mountain.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister,

some people in my riding benefit from this government's assistance when it comes to affordable housing. After severe underfunding at the hands of the previous government, I know this government is back in the housing business. I want to thank the local service manager and the municipal government for their support in delivering affordable housing programs to my riding.

Can the minister please tell me what this government is doing to continue to support families in my riding of Hamilton Mountain who rely on affordable housing?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me thank the honourable member from Hamilton Mountain. We're very proud to be back in the affordable housing business. In fact, the city of Hamilton was the recipient of $5.6 million for repair and rehabilitation money, part of a $100-million fund of Premier McGuinty's government in the 2008 budget.

We have funding for 35,000 rent supplements. We also have released the lowest average rent increase in Ontario history—1.4% under the Residential Tenancies Act.

Interjections.

Hon. Jim Watson: My friends from the NDP, who are laughing at the unemployed in Ottawa—as an Ottawa member, I don't appreciate that kind of rude behaviour to the people of Ottawa.

We also have the rent bank, which has prevented 13,200 evictions, thanks to this initiative that was promised in the 2003 campaign, and we're delivering.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I want to thank the minister for the answer, but I also want to ask him about the future of the Ontario rent bank. The assistance provided by the Ontario rent bank has helped thousands of Ontario households get through temporary financial difficulties so that they can keep a roof over their heads. In my riding of Hamilton Mountain, some people rely on help to pay their rent. The Ontario rent bank is a popular tool that helps families stay in their homes, but some local service managers are running out of money.

Minister, what are you doing to help the service managers keep providing rent bank monies to families in my riding?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very proud of the rent bank. For those people who are not familiar with it, from time to time, some of our fellow citizens do have difficulty making their rent. They may perhaps have been laid off or have lost their jobs on a temporary basis. Often that one month or two months of rent is just not available.

Interjections.

Hon. Jim Watson: And here we have the spectacle of the NDP laughing at a housing program that they voted against.

This rent bank program is important. It has helped prevent 13,200 tenants from being evicted. It saved over $7.7 million in emergency shelter costs. It gives people the dignity of a roof over their head. Some service managers are having difficulty because of a lack of funding. We will be there to help those individuals and to help those service managers by providing funding, as we have since 2004, for a total of $18.8 million. We're very proud of the program.

PLANT CLOSURE

Mr. Tim Hudak: I have a question to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade concerning the 120 plant workers who lost their jobs at CanGro and the 150 affected tender fruit growers in the area.

Last week, I asked the minister why she walked away from two offers to purchase and operate that plant. The minister replied, and I'm quoting from Hansard, "We were at the table, making the offers that we have made."

Minister, can you tell the members of the Legislature and the people of Hamilton and Niagara exactly what offers the government put on the table?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm very happy to address this issue once again, and in particular for the people of Niagara. What's very important to us in this government is that we have a canning business in Ontario. This is one of the remaining few in the nation, and in particular we wanted it right here in Ontario.

The difficulty is this: When the Ontario government comes to the table to discuss with CanGro the opportunity to work with partners to be able to purchase the operation from CanGro, we actually need CanGro to participate in that kind of a deal. We, all of us at the table, are not successful in keeping CanGro at the table to want to participate in a sale. That is a very critical piece to have in order to make something work. You need the company to want to sell. It was a very, very difficult discussion to see that we could not get that kind of participation from CanGro.

Mr. Tim Hudak: We contacted both of the potential buyers about the minister's fanciful tales and, to put it politely—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I withdraw.

We asked both of the potential buyers about the minister's tale and, to put it politely, they said, "Horse feathers." In fact, they both had co-operated with CanGro to make proposals to the province of Ontario. I don't know if we'll ever find out exactly why the McGuinty government chose to let this deal collapse and see the plant close down, but it brought up the very frustrating image of the minister in China cutting a ribbon, while pink slips are being handed out to workers in Niagara.

Minister, with the plant now closing and with trees being pulled out of the ground, what are you going to do today to help Niagara tender fruit growers and the 100 displaced workers?

1510

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I have to tell you that I too had questions when we knew, after becoming the government in 2003, that that government, and that member in particular, participated in giving CanGro $4 million. We find out today, of course, that there were no strings, like the opportunity to keep them in operation in Ontario, attached to this $4 million. The money, in fact, was for

equipment to help them become more productive—things that should have helped CanGro.

We too would still like to see CanGro here. In the absence of that, we would like to see groups come together locally. The government is not in the business of canning, but we are in the business of looking to see how something could work. We would need to see that production would still exist after a year. We would need to see that there are tender fruit growers who would provide the feedstock for canning. These are the kinds of components that the taxpayers would expect us to participate in, and I would appreciate —

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A question for the Minister of the Environment: Algoma Steel wants to restart blast furnace number six without adequate pollution controls. Will you withhold a certificate of approval for start-up until a baghouse is in place?

Hon. John Gerretsen: As the member well knows, the federal member in that particular riding raised this issue, as well as our own member there, and we responded to it immediately.

Obviously, we're very much interested in the air quality in Algoma. We're looking at various aspects as to how it can be dealt with. We want to make sure that the air quality is not only good for the people of Sault Ste. Marie, but through the entire province. I can assure you that we will come up with a solution to this particular problem, so that the kind of situation that exists there right now will not occur in the future.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Even for this minister that was an extraordinarily vague response. Will he or will he not require that a baghouse be in place before he issues a certificate of approval?

Hon. John Gerretsen: You know, air quality issues are a concern to this government, but they're also probably one of the toughest things to deal with within the entire Ministry of the Environment because, of course, air quality is not only created by particular circumstances in a particular area, but comes from elsewhere in North America as well.

I can tell you that we're studying this matter; we're looking into it. We want to make sure that the air quality for the people of Sault Ste. Marie and the people of this area is the best it can possibly be. But we also want to make sure that the jobs that are involved at Algoma Steel are obviously going to be protected in whatever way we can. We're taking the environment in that area very seriously, and we will make sure that whatever needs to be done is going to be done.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. We know that many in this House were excited about the recent expansion of Ontario's pilot provincial nominee program. For the first time ever, the government of Ontario now has the ability to nominate, among recent post-secondary graduates from across the country, individuals to the federal government to be fast-tracked for permanent residency status.

Would the minister tell us how this program will help address Ontario's labour market needs?

Hon. Michael Chan: Many thanks to the honourable member from Mississauga South for bringing this matter to the Legislature's attention. The Ontario pilot provincial nominee program is the first of its kind in this province. With the most recent revision, the program is now available to graduating university and college students who have received an offer of full-time employment in the province of Ontario.

The pilot provincial nominee program allows the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration to work together with our federal counterparts at Citizenship and Immigration Canada to address Ontario's labour market needs by nominating up to 500 newcomers annually.

Mr. Charles Sousa: With world-class post-secondary institutions in many ridings around the province, I know that this pilot program has generated a large amount of excitement. There are 35,000 international students studying at post-secondary institutions in Ontario and many more around the country. With such a tremendous pool of international students to draw from, Ontario is well positioned indeed for the challenges of the 21st century. Would the minister tell us what the response to the program has been like, and how does the program help businesses and individuals alike?

Hon. Michael Chan: Ontario has a proud history of welcoming newcomers. Our province has benefited greatly from the successive waves of immigration.

Studies have shown that Canada's newcomers who have the opportunity to study and work in Canada face fewer barriers to integration. They also achieve economic success at a higher rate. The honourable member is correct in pointing out that this is a pilot program. However, it's on track to be one of the most successful provincial nominee programs in the country. The McGuinty government's commitment to newcomers remains strong. We in the government know that when newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Michael Bryant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wish to correct my own record. In an answer to a question, I said to the member that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal had issued an eviction notice. That is not the case. It was in fact Six Nations Council Chief Bill Montour who issued the eviction notice. My regrets, Mr. Speaker.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to take this opportunity on behalf of the leader of the third party

to introduce some students who are visiting Queen's Park today from Henry Kelsey Senior Public School along with their teacher, Yvette Blackburn. We hope they enjoy their visit.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition from the Shallow Lake United Church, the Louise Women's Institute and the Central Westside United Church in Owen Sound, and it's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I've also signed this.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition from the part-time workers in colleges in Sudbury.

"Whereas part-time college workers in Ontario have been waiting for 30 years for bargaining rights; and

"Whereas thousands of part-time college workers have signed OPSEU cards, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board failed to order a timely representation vote; and

"Whereas the Ontario government must immediately make good on its promise to extend bargaining rights to college part-timers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The McGuinty government must immediately pass legislation legalizing the rights of college part-timers to organize, and direct the colleges to immediately recognize OPSEU as the bargaining agent for part-time college workers."

I support this petition and will affix my name to it and give it to page Arjun.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Dave Levac: I'm pleased to stand to provide a petition to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles and support Bill 56. This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles;"—trunks and elsewhere—"and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;"—and to keep them safe—

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I sign my name to this petition in support and hand it to Matthew, our page.

1520

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, more specifically from Trulls Road Free Methodist Church in my riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I'm pleased to present this on behalf of my constituents and present it to Cali, one of the new pages who started today.

HOME CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU and the people from Spanish, Serpent River and Blind River.

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care

delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;..."

They ask the Ontario government:

"(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I support this petition. I'll sign my name to it and send it with page Matthew.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Pat Hoy: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending drivers' licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I too have signed this petition.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the Speaker has received over 4,200 calls regarding this issue; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our spiritual and parliamentary tradition since it was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my name in full support.

HOME CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition from the Service Employees International Union and the people of Kitchener, Zurich, Clinton and Bayfield.

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;..."

They ask the Ontario government:

"(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I support this petition, will sign my name to it and send it with Emily.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to read this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly and I'd like to thank Dr. Neil Woolfson of Mississauga and his patients for having sent it to me. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the

ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and certainly support this petition and to ask page Bilaal to carry it for me

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East local health integration network board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government—it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

I will affix my signature to that and pass it to Matthew.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bruce Crozier: In co-operation with my colleague from Mississauga–Streetsville, I read this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm sure page Sheilagh will take this to the table for me.

1530

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: Because of the time element, I will commence partway through this petition:

"Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, its largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds

from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact on the quality care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I will affix my signature, and pass it to Thomas.

OPPOSITION DAY

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I move that whereas one of the goals of the Ontario smoke-free strategy is "to prevent smoking among Ontario's children, youth and young adults"; and

Whereas, according to the Ministry of Health Promotion's website, each year 90,000 kids in Ontario try smoking; and

Whereas an illegal smoke shop is operating on provincial land on Argyle Street in downtown Caledonia; and

Whereas the said smoke shop is located within metres of Notre Dame elementary school and within a kilometre of a local high school; and

Whereas residents in Caledonia report seeing children riding bicycles with cartons of cigarettes on their handlebars; and

Whereas illegal smoke shops are selling untested cigarettes without warnings to children and without asking for identification; and

Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government refuses to shut down illegal smoke shops in Ontario, particularly the one on Argyle Street in Caledonia;

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the McGuinty government to move immediately to shut down all illegal smoke shops in Ontario and prosecute vendors of illegal cigarettes to the fullest extent of the law.

That is addressed to the Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day motion number 2. I'm pleased to recognize the Leader of the Opposition to lead off.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me.

I want to say at the outset that this, from the perspective of the official opposition, the Progressive Conservative Party, is essentially a health issue. We're primarily concerned about the health of children in the Caledonia area, but well beyond that as well, in terms of the impact of illegal smoke shops operating apparently with impunity within the province of Ontario.

When we've had debates and discussions in this House over the years related to curtailing smoking in Ontario and curbs on smoking in Ontario, we've frequently had groups in the gallery who are adamantly opposed to smoking, no matter where it might occur in the province. I remember a gentleman by the name of Garfield Mahood who was here on virtually every occasion. But strangely, we don't see those people with respect to this issue. We clearly don't hear the government, but we don't see all of those other people who professed on a regular basis in the past to be concerned about the impacts of smoking—second-hand smoke in restaurants, bars, lounges, etc.—in public places. Of course, this Legislature and governments past and present have moved to address that issue. But here we have a situation where I think it's legitimate to ask about the sincerity of people who can make that kind of distinction, who can say it's wrong for vendors in legal operations, primarily in convenience stores in this province, to do certain things in terms of sale of cigarettes, but essentially ignore illegal operations that are making cheap and illegal cigarettes available, in many instances, to kids.

I suggest this is a sort of conspiracy of silence. I would call it a deathly silence. I think "deathly" is an appropriate word to use because I think we all agree that cigarettes kill, and not just the ones that are sold in convenience stores.

Where are the folks? Where are the people speaking up about this issue? Where is the Minister of Health Promotion? When she is asked questions about these kind of operations in Ontario, she declines to answer. She refers the question to the Solicitor General, who then obfuscates and talks about other issues, rather than the question directed to the Minister of Health Promotion dealing with the sale of illegal cigarettes to children in this province.

We're told that currently 38% of the cigarettes in Ontario are now coming through illegal operations. I say "conspiracy of silence." Regrettably, I say this: It even seems to extend to some elements of the media. We've raised this issue on a number of occasions in this place, and I recall—I could be mistaken—Christina Blizzard of the Toronto Sun as the only one who has written or reported on this issue.

When we originally raised the issue with the Minister of Health Promotion, there was a huge scrum of the minister outside, all kinds of television cameras, yet nothing appeared on the electronic media, and nothing in the print media. I'm not sure what happens, whether the

editors at the television stations and the print operations simply cut that off. I'm not sure. The reality is, it's not just the government, it's not just the lobby groups that lobby against smoking, it's also to some degree, regrettably, the media that don't want to touch this, which I agree is a rather sensitive issue. There's no question about it.

It is a real problem. We're talking about cigarettes where there are no warning signs, no labels, no understanding of where these cigarettes or the tobacco in these cigarettes are coming from, or what's contained in that tobacco. There's no lab analysis required and no indication of the contents.

We just have to go back to a police raid recently where hundreds of thousands of illegal cigarettes were found coming in from China, and a number of arrests occurred as a result. Well, that's the kind of thing that's happening. Those kinds of products are getting into these stores and being dispensed, and who knows what is contained in the tobacco? Certainly in the Caledonia area, with the store that we've cited in the motion, we know that cigarettes are being sold to minors, to kids. We've had people telling us about kids going away from there with cartons of cigarettes on their bicycle handles. These are very serious operations.

When you talk about these legal operations—and I'm talking primarily of convenience stores. I was in a convenience store recently in my hometown of Brockville and I met a very young guy, who is operating this, having a real struggle to make ends meet in this operation. He was working on putting shelves underneath, where cigarettes would be out of sight—he couldn't afford to hire anyone—to hide cigarettes from public view.

He was telling me that within the last month he has had two inspectors in to ensure that he's doing it and that his cigarettes—he's complying with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act requirements. He has also had an audit—two inspections and an audit in less than two months of a young Ontarian paying his taxes, abiding by the law. That's the kind of—I would suggest—harassment by the bureaucracy while they ignore all of these illegal operations, with the endorsement of this Liberal government. That's the reality: with the endorsement of this Liberal government. Turn a blind eye to lawlessness: That's essentially what's happening, and at the same time jeopardize the health of young people in this province.

1540

You can be so self-righteous—we see it day after day in the Liberal ranks across the room here—about issues like this: "We're going to protect the health of Ontarians." But here, when we're talking about 38% of the cigarettes being sold in this province going through illegal operations, they won't even answer a question about it. They won't respond.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Shameful.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It is indeed shameful. They're putting at risk the health of young people and many other Ontarians, and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has the gall to get up here today and say, "We're going to kick these folks off the land." Then he gets up and corrects his own record and says, "No, we're not going to kick them off; Six Nations is going to kick them off." Who owns the property? Have you ceded ownership of the property? There's nothing but mumbo-jumbo, no real effort to justify a position—which is unjustifiable, without question.

This government has a lot to explain. They cannot explain it. We call upon them to shut down these illegal operations and protect the health of our children.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I am happy to say a few words on this particular motion. I want to say that parts of this motion are things that I personally can support and other parts of the motion trouble me a little bit.

When the member from Leeds–Grenville talks about the issue being a health-related issue, I say, yes, that's a good point, and we could and should be talking about that. I am interested in this whole issue a great deal because I am not a smoker. I find cigarettes offensive and distasteful, although I have indulged in a cigar from time to time, I have to admit. But every effort that we have made over the years to try to discourage people from smoking is an effort that I support.

Over the last 20 years, people have made an effort to persuade governments that we need to be tough on the issue of smoking because it kills individuals and it affects their families and because it's an incredible health burden on society that we pay for. That is something we should be proud of in terms of advances we have made. And we have made advances in this regard because people have pressed governments—have pressed us—to do more. We continue to make headway in this regard because we know by the statistics that fewer and fewer people are smoking, and this is a positive thing.

Twenty years ago when governments made any effort to reduce individual freedoms, they were faced with incredible indignation and anger. Today, every effort that governments make with respect to how we reduce individual smoking is greeted with a great deal of support by the general public. This is a very good thing.

We know that tobacco use kills about 50,000 Canadians a year and leads to tens of billions of dollars in health care costs. Lung cancer rates are going down among men in Canada because of the campaign that people have waged against smoking. This is a very good thing.

But when I read the motion and I look at the first two parts of it, I say okay, "Whereas one of the goals of the Ontario smoke-free strategy is 'to prevent smoking among Ontario's children, youth and young adults'; and

"Whereas, according to the Ministry of Health Promotion's website, each year 90,000 kids in Ontario try smoking"—it appears that that is the issue we're dealing with, but as you read on, the next "whereas" troubles me a little bit. It's particularly focused on Caledonia—not somewhere else, not generally speaking; it's focused on Caledonia, where there has been a great

deal of conflict. So I'm worried about how we do things in this place that either help to reduce conflict or help to inflame it.

When I look at, "Whereas an illegal smoke shop is operating on provincial land on Argyle Street in downtown Caledonia," it's very specific, which is the subject of what much of the dispute is all about.

The next one, "Whereas the said smoke shop is located within metres of Notre Dame elementary school and within a kilometre of a local high school," and the next one, "Whereas residents in Caledonia report seeing children riding bicycles with cartons of cigarettes on their handlebars"—it's very specific and it creates an image of the type of youth we're speaking to and may be indirectly denigrating, indirectly saying, "These are the kinds of kids we're targeting and these are the kinds of problems we've got that we've got to deal with." It's provocative, in my view.

I don't know whether this is the intent, but in my view, as I read it, the indirect intent is that. Whether it's direct or indirect, it's painful to me to see it because the effect is the same.

While I have sympathy with Mr. Runciman saying, "This is about health," and I would love to support him and the direction he seemed to be going with the initial comments, when I read the body of the motion it's very specific what we're after here. And I believe we're inflaming the conflict in Caledonia with Six Nations people.

I don't know what the Conservatives are after. I know what I read by way of possible intent. So, yes, we should be tough. Why not have a motion that says, "Okay, we're going to close down these illegal smoke shops across Ontario"? If you had a motion like that, I'd say, "Okay, I could probably live with that, because perhaps the government isn't doing enough to shut these places down. We need strong enforcement. Let's deal with that." But it's very specific to Caledonia, even though there is mention here that we're not just talking about Caledonia in particular but illegal smoke shops across Ontario. I'm sorry; that's what I read when you present this motion.

I really do believe that there are times in society that, when we do things, we have to find ways to promote peaceful co-existence between us, whoever we are, rather than finding ways of disagreeing. So when the member for Leeds–Grenville talks about "lawlessness" as it relates to this particular incidence in Caledonia and that we have to apply the law equally, I am reminded about how we apply the law unequally as it relates to issues happening in northern Ontario, where our leader says on a regular basis that we have a duty to consult, constitutionally and legally, with First Nations before we do something that affects them adversely. So when it comes to prospecting and mining—mining corporations can go into lands that belong to First Nations people, can set up shop and start mining—we're not applying the law equally there, it seems; we're applying it unequally.

If we have a duty to consult, constitutionally and legally, and we do not, we are not applying the law equally. But I do not hear my Conservative friends saying, "Ah, you're right about that one." We don't talk about that, but we do talk about Caledonia a great deal. If we're going to apply the law equally, perhaps we should balance it out a little bit. We're not doing that.

In this regard, I am attacking the Liberal government because we have not consulted aboriginal people, First Nations people, before we do something that affects them negatively. We consult them as it relates to mining in the north, as it relates to First Nations people, after the fact, not before the fact, and that worries me in terms of how we treat people who were here before we were. We are immigrants. First Nations people are not immigrants. They were here before us a long, long time ago, before some white travellers decided to come and take over. So I regard First Nations as a people, as a nation. We are people, yes, who came here and invaded, took over, mistreated and caused alcoholism in their communities for generations, and we attack them for something we caused unto them. There was no alcoholism before we came. There was barely sickness before we came and killed them with our own germs that we brought to the First Nations people. That's another story. Quite right, it's another story.

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But in my view, if we're going to talk about health and cigarette smoking and how that affects them, and if we're going to talk about what we should be doing against illegal smoke shops, let's do it in a much more general way and let's focus on whether we are enforcing the law well or adequately. What is it that we could be doing? What is it, by the way, that other provinces are doing? Have we looked at that? I don't think we have, neither the government nor the official opposition.

Places like Manitoba and British Columbia have already taken action on matters of this sort. Tax treaties, such as in Manitoba, allow native bands to apply for and collect PST, the provincial sales tax, and there are also federal agreements regarding the GST. Have we looked at this in terms of how we might help to deal with problems of this nature: more efficient sales tax collection mechanisms, use of electronic cash registers and tobacco tax exemption ID cards as in British Columbia and Alberta? It requires store owners to pay tax upfront to suppliers, thus reducing circulation of untaxed cigarettes. Have we looked at measures of this sort that attempt to deal with issues that I'm assuming the Conservative Party is raising here today? We're not looking at that very well.

Are we looking at education? We might be saying it, but are we doing much about it? I don't think we are. Cigarette smoking is very high in the aboriginal community, in the indigenous community. What are we doing about that? Have we talked about how we help in that regard? We talk about how we should enforce, and we look at punitive ways of attacking them and/or the problem, but we don't look at ways of how we can prevent the problem in the first place. Why are they affected in the way they are, and what could we be doing about it?

In my view, yes, it's enforcement, but I find the motion a tad punitive. We're looking at punitive ways of getting to people, at people, rather than figuring out what the problems are and what we could do to be helpful. I say this, with respect, to the Conservative Party members: While I agree with parts of this motion and the sentiment expressed in parts of this motion, I am concerned about the implication and the potential to inflame an already very troubled situation in Caledonia, and so I wanted to for the record express my reservations on this motion today.

Hon. Michael Bryant: This will make him uncomfortable, but I want to say to the member for Trinity–Spadina that I thought that was an excellent speech. I know that's going to make him uncomfortable because he didn't mean to express words of support for a particular government. I think he meant to raise some very important questions about what this opposition motion is really all about, and he spoke to it extremely well.

This issue, again I would agree, and the motion that's put forward—like the member from Trinity–Spadina, there's a lot in this that is just factual with respect to illegal smoke shops selling untested cigarettes without warnings, without asking for identification. One of the goals of the Ontario smoke-free strategy is "to prevent smoking among Ontario's children," and so on. It's hard to disagree with some of the factual statements.

Then, as the member for Trinity–Spadina said, there's a real focus on a smoke shack shop on Argyle Street. And it is; it's that one.

This is not a motion about the underground economy. This is not a motion about piracy of DVDs and music. This is not a motion about the underground retail economy that takes place across the province. This is not a motion about the supply and demand of contraband cigarettes—it's not. This is a motion about Caledonia and about a smoke shack on Argyle street.

The leader of the official opposition says that the government of Ontario should do something about this, but he doesn't say what that is. As Mr. Bradley said, "It's a dog whistle."

So let's just go through the options, okay? Number one, tell the police what to do. Tell the police to go in there.

Interjection.

Hon. Michael Bryant: No. The report of the Ipperwash inquiry is very clear: "It is not appropriate for the government to enter the law enforcement domain of the police. Law enforcement properly falls within the responsibility of the police. To maintain police independence, the government cannot direct when and how to enforce the law." The Ipperwash commission goes on to talk about why that is, the importance of having a separation between police and government.

But I think it's also important to say that the OPP members who testified—one a crowd management unit commander—made reference to what happens with respect to an aboriginal protest, which is different than a smoke shack, no question about it. It made reference to the fact that a First Nation can react, "very explosively very quickly." The CMU commander understood and said that there were "precipitating factors" that were, in his words, "historical, political and racial." And as is stated here again by the Ipperwash commission, there's a focus on the job of the police "to minimize the potential for violence and facilitate constitutionally protected rights." We saw the OPP do that over the weekend.

So you say, "Well, wait a minute, this isn't a protest; this is a smoke shack." Regardless of arguments on both sides as to whether or not it amounts to a protest, it is a smoke shack. As members have said and as is in the opposition motion, it does not operate consistent with federal, provincial or municipal law. It was actually not supported, but condemned, by Six Nations band council.

So what are the solutions? Just as the OPP has to weigh whether or not their actions might precipitate, in the words of the Ipperwash commission, an explosive reaction, which is in nobody's interest, so they must make those decisions when considering this particular situation.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Will the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound please refrain from heckling the minister.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Thanks, Speaker.

So what other than police action, which is in the hands of police? They have to weigh the specific concerns around what the reaction would be and whether or not that would significantly escalate an always tense situation there.

I'm reminded of what the federal government does with respect to the smoke shacks on reserves. Minister Clement, in a letter in 2007, says that in order to deal with the "current climate," the on-site inspection of smoke shacks is "temporarily suspended," by Minister Clement. Why does he do that? Because of the climate, he said.

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The recommendations made by CAMH are certainly ones worth exploring. They address those recommendations to the federal government, the point being that the supply of this, in the words of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, is located within "geographic proximity to the major sites of production, smuggling and retail sales, which are located in First Nations communities in Ontario and Quebec."

CAMH goes on to talk about, and acknowledge, the inadequate economic opportunities for First Nations people, but then goes on to refer to the contribution of the smoke shacks and the contraband cigarettes as "clearly intolerable."

Recommendations are made here by the centre, and in particular by Dr. Paul Garfinkel, the president and chief executive officer, which include—and it's in reference to an Ontario Tobacco Research Unit report—"revoking licences from manufacturers operating illegally and encouraging First Nations reserves to collect their own tobacco taxes."

The member for Trinity–Spadina made reference to that. The Navajo Nation, for example, taxes cigarettes on the reservation and collects those revenues.

The tackling of supply is going to be the big challenge with this issue. It is not going to be answered by the direction offered here by the official opposition in their motion. The leader of the official opposition wants to condemn the government for inaction. Well, I want to condemn the official opposition for this motion, the purpose of which is inevitably going to escalate, not de-escalate—how could anything in this motion de-escalate or contribute to a resolution?

Is there anything here that would result in a resolution between, say, Haudenoshonee Six Nations and the government of Ontario? No. Is there anything in this which comes anywhere near the constructive suggestions made by the member for Trinity–Spadina and by CAMH and Dr. Garfinkel? No. It's just, "Do something about it," says the official opposition.

Again, the police have a very tough job to do. Their job is to deal with enforcement and they do it well. The suggestion here, and the motion here, presumably is to generate some solidarity amongst Ontarians who also have a great concern about this taking place. But the problem with this motion, fundamentally, is that I find that it is divisive. It is not going to contribute to a solution. It is not going to contribute to a de-escalation of tensions. I feel that it is really calling upon divisiveness within the province.

We need to tackle the solutions—no question—and tackle supply and demand, but it is not, in any way, shape or form, going to come about as a result of the spirit and intent, cause and effect, that is found in this motion. The leader of the official opposition says, "Shame on the government." I say to him, shame on you.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I regret this issue of illegal tobacco has to be brought before the House. There is an unintended partnership of this government's policy and the underground economy, and it's certainly put Canadian tobacco farmers and anybody else involved in the legal tobacco trade at a competitive disadvantage. Why is that? Because, in part, this government has jacked up taxes considerably since its inception. It reminds me of a quote from Samuel Johnson: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

This particular government policy is not working, and that's nowhere more evident than in my riding and the counties of Oxford, Elgin, Brant and Middlesex.

I will say off the top that, in contrast to what we just heard, we as a society could help resolve this crisis and help make our communities a little safer through enforcement and as well by reducing tobacco taxes. I used to work for the Addiction Research Foundation, and there were many, many smoke shops locally in the mid-1990s. Taxes were reduced in both Ontario and Quebec, and overnight in Six Nations alone, 300 smoke shops disappeared. So there are ways of dealing with this.

Despite tobacco tax revenue being at an all-time high, the sales of not only counterfeit but also contraband—the illicit products and brands sold by native people—mean that federal and provincial governments are losing something in the order of $1.6 billion in additional taxes. The Premier here attributes the $73.4-million drop in tax revenues to Smoke-Free Ontario. Those of us with any inkling of economics know full well that that money has gone to the tax-free black market. Why any government would support the underground economy I don't know. If this government did lower taxes, we would see those 300 shacks disappear in Six Nations. As I said, it happened in the 1990s.

When I worked on a tobacco farm, there were well over 3,000 farmers. We're now down to barely 600 farmers. Again, legal farming, legal manufacturing, people who play by the rules, the legal corner stores are suffering. They cannot compete with this illegal trade. Furthermore, cheap smokes obviously undermine the sin tax strategy, the policies of this government. We've heard the figures. I know a year ago the illicit trade accounted for something like 25% to 30% of sales. Back in 2006, it was only about 16.5%. Now we hear figures of 38% illegal trade, more than doubling in a number of years.

More illegal cigarettes are smoked in Ontario than any other province across Canada. A study that was conducted last year by GFK Research Dynamics found that one out of three cigarettes smoked in Ontario between May and June of 2007 was contraband. Half of Canada's total illegal sales come out of Ontario. It's unacceptable. Everyone is affected, and the funds used to buy these cigarettes are certainly impacting the local communities through higher crime. It feeds crime—not only illegal tobacco, but the gun trade and the drug trade. So it is time for this government to partner with the federal government, undermine these gangs, remove the demand and place this province once again in a position to enforce laws, to enforce government policy and take a swing at this illegal trade.

The corner store operators will tell you that higher taxes and the increased illegal sales really put them in a position to try and scramble to make some money. Cigarettes may not turn a high profit, but they do bring in other trade to buy newspapers, pop, for example, and groceries. Higher taxes help fund the illegal trade, and as a result are forcing the legal people out.

Last December, one of my constituents who lives in Caledonia, named Doug Fleming, held a news conference here in the media studio. I will just quote Mr. Fleming. "I'm here to protest illegal smoke shops. I refer to them as illegal because they operate on deeded land that is part of Haldimand county." He talked about the first smoke shop that was opened down there—this would be a year ago the coming June—the second four months later and another one in November. All three smoke shacks are being operated by residents of Six Nations. Mr Fleming reported that on the way out of town one day he noticed a young fellow, about 14 years old, riding his bicycle. He had a bag—it would be probably 200 cigarettes—on his handlebars. He reported this to the police. They really didn't seem to be interested. So he did a bit of a search,

he looked through the land registry office for the land title and discovered the land on which the smoke shack sat was not reserve land, but rather deeded land and therefore legally subject to Haldimand county bylaws. He went to the county to inquire which permits had been issued. None had been issued.

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So what did Mr Fleming do? He opened his own smoke shop. He called it Doug's Smokes. He put it on a vacant lot in Caledonia, and he was careful not to break any laws that weren't already being broken by native people. As he says, "That way, if the OPP arrested me, they would have to arrest them too. My aim, however, was not to make money. It was to get the attention of the OPP." He suggested to the police he was breaking the law and perhaps they should arrest him. They refused. As Mr. Fleming says, "I had to turn to a life of crime in an attempt to have the law enforced, but it isn't working."

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I can't say that I'm happy to be part of this debate. Quite frankly, I find it somewhat troubling, because what is being argued here is that somehow or other, at the end of the day, under the guise of a motion to deal with smoke shops, we're really dealing with the issue of selling illegal cigarettes. I say that's a real issue that we do need to deal with, and I say that upfront. It has a lot to do with fanning the situation in Caledonia, probably more than we need to.

I want to say something at the outset. I've heard Conservative members in this House, on and on in question period and in debate, talk about how the law is not applied equally. I want to agree with you. You're right, it is not applied equally to First Nations. As I look in northern Ontario, the place I represent, for example, we have the issue of duty to consult, which says that aboriginal communities must be consulted when a mining company moves in and says, "I want to explore on your territory, and then I want to develop a mine." Are those rules really being followed? No.

So why, all of a sudden, are we excited about this particular issue of this smoke shop in Caledonia, yet the Conservatives say nothing when it comes to the laws not being applied fairly to First Nations across this province on other issues? You can draw your own conclusion as to what you would term that, but that's my problem with this debate.

I look, for example, at the communities I represent and the whole issue of duty to consult. First Nations are saying, "We want development, we want mining, we want forestry to happen," but do they get the same treatment? Do they get the same laws applied to them when it comes to jobs, when it comes to the ability to share revenue from those projects? Absolutely not.

They signed treaties over 100 years ago. Our provincial and federal governments at the time said, "We want to share the land with you." The First Nations leaders at the time said, "Yes, we're prepared to share, because that's in our nature." Did we share? Absolutely not. For 50 years after the first signing of the treaties, we basically kept on taking what we could out of the land and didn't give a penny back to First Nations. Then, 50 years after, we said, "Oh, we've got a solution. We're going to build reserves and we're going to put all First Nations people on these postage stamps called reserves so that they don't bother the developers when they come into their territory." And then we snatched their kids and we put them into residential schools. Did their children get the same treatment as every other child? Absolutely not.

So you're right, Conservatives. The laws are not applied equally, and they have not been applied equally to First Nations for over 100 years in this country. I find it somewhat appalling in this debate that we somehow are going to seize on the issue of a smoke shop in Caledonia that is illegal. And I agree with you, the law should be applied. But we say nothing about what has happened to First Nations for the last 100 years.

I look at simple issues in my communities. For example, we all know the story of Kashechewan when we had the E coli outbreak. Why was that? Because laws that are applied anywhere else in Ontario were not applied and are still not applied in First Nations. The whole issue about how water plants had to be built and how they had to be monitored and how we have to follow the law was not done and it's still not being done. Eighty per cent of the water plants on reserve are basically under boil-water advisories or unsafe to the citizens who live in those communities. Are we applying the laws equally, federally or provincially, to First Nations? No.

You look at the issue of building codes when it comes to building houses on reserves—the building codes that are applied anywhere else in Ontario. If you build a house, there are building codes, and you have to follow those codes to make sure that the house is built in a way that is in standing with the laws that apply to this province. Do we do that with First Nations? Absolutely not. In Fort Albany, we built 30 houses on a floodplain and we put basements in them. How preposterous can you get? And we wonder why we have mouldy houses in Fort Albany. So yes, the laws are not applied equally and that is a problem. This debate is not about smoke shops. This debate is more about trying to fan what is going on in Caledonia.

I want to say upfront, I agree with the Conservatives on one point, and that is the law should be applied equally. In the case of smoke shops in my riding, in the riding of wherever Caledonia is and in the riding of my good friend from Nickel Belt, we have the same issues. Apply the law. I don't have a problem with that. But why is this motion about Caledonia only? The motion talks about the need to apply the law in the province but it focuses specifically on Caledonia. I think the design of this motion is pretty simple: It's to fan the flames.

So I say yes, let's have laws in this province that are applied to all. But if there are frustrations in First Nations communities, if we have leaders who are jailed out of KI and Ardoch and if we have people who have done what they have done in Caledonia, it's because they've been frustrated that the laws have not been applied equally. They've had to live to a second standard that has been

applied to them, which nobody else has had applied to themselves. I say it's high time in this province that we have a law for all so that First Nations can keep their heads up high and walk proudly in this province we call Ontario by being treated the same as any other citizen of this province—making sure that they have clean drinking water, that they can participate when it comes to jobs in their communities, when it comes to mining, making sure that there are building codes that apply as equally to them as to anybody else and making sure water plants are built to a standard. When we do that, maybe then we can talk about the smoke shop in Caledonia.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I call for further debate, I wish to inform the House of the late shows for tonight. Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, concerning collection of rent on the Argyle Street smoke shop. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

As well, pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs concerning the barricades and problems at Tyendinaga, Deseronto, and barricades and problems at Six Nations, Caledonia. This matter will be debated at approximately 6:10 p.m. tonight.

Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I rise to speak against this motion. As several of the speakers today have already noted, this is a motion dealing with a very specific and a very difficult situation. As our Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has said repeatedly in this House, our government does not interfere with the operational decisions of the OPP or any other police service in Ontario.

Muddled into this motion, I have heard the leader of the official opposition make some completely unjust aspersions regarding the work of the Ministry of Health Promotion and our partners in the community—the 36 public health units. There is no question that our government is helping Ontarians when it comes to smoking, especially young people. So I wish to address this issue from the perspective of a former medical officer of health and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion.

When it comes to smoking, we have a three-step approach. We have a plan on enforcement; helping people to quit through cessation programs; and public education. In 2006, we enacted one of the toughest anti-smoking pieces of legislation in North America. We understood the cost of smoking on our health care system and economy. In 2003, only $10 million was allocated toward tobacco control programs. Since then, our government has increased funding to $60 million. That's a 600% increase, and we have had real success: Tobacco consumption has fallen by 31.8% between 2003 and 2006.

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We are doing more to ensure that youth do not pick up the habit of smoking. That's why we've committed some $25 million toward innovative programs designed to prevent children and youth from smoking, including the website stupid.ca, which is an innovative and award-winning multimedia campaign developed by youth, for youth, to make teenagers aware of the dangers of smoking. In March 2008 alone there were a total of 56,223 visits to that website.

Another program aimed at youth is the Youth Action Alliance. It operates in high schools across the province to educate students about the dangers of smoking. As I said before, we work in partnership with public health unit officials to enforce the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. We recognize the need to enforce the act and protect children from purchasing tobacco. That's why we hired 143 enforcement officers to ensure compliance with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

Consistency is a major issue. Some members have related issues with consistency of enforcement. The Ministry of Health Promotion regularly ensures across the 36 public health units that the Smoke-Free Ontario Act is enforced in a consistent way. In fact, since May 31, 2007, some 6,000 charges have been laid. We take these responsibilities very seriously.

When it comes to cigarettes without appropriate health warnings, these enforcement officers are required, they have a duty, to inform those with appropriate authority to deal with these matters. It is not something that these enforcement officers deal with if they find cigarettes being sold without proper health warnings.

In particular in the area of Haldimand–Norfolk, we have been working with the Haldimand–Norfolk public health unit. Our government provides approximately $115,000 to support Youth Action Alliance activities. In 2007, this program hired eight local youth, with the support of an adult adviser, to raise awareness in the community about the harmful effects of smoking. We continue to support the Smoke-Free Ontario high school grant program. In 2007, four high schools in the Haldimand–Norfolk area participated in the grants program.

I'm really quite concerned about the member from Haldimand–Norfolk's opinion as it relates to the tobacco issue. In June 2003 he was quoted in the Brantford Expositor in response to a campaign by the local medical officer of health. He stated, "In my view, the jury is out on second-hand smoke.... I have never seen a coroner's report indicating it as a cause of death." Hope springs eternal. Perhaps in the intervening nearly five years the member has changed his opinion. But I would like to remind him of some of the very persuasive evidence as it relates to the dangers of tobacco.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has officially labelled second-hand smoke as a class A cancer-causing substance, the most dangerous of cancer-causing agents. Second-hand smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals and more than 50 cancer-causing agents. Second-hand smoke causes many of the same health problems in non-smokers that are suffered by smokers, including lung cancer and heart disease. A non-smoker in a smoky room

such as a bar inhales the equivalent of 35 cigarettes an hour.

Our Smoke-Free Ontario Act protects the citizens of this province, and I am convinced that our efforts in this regard in terms of enforcement, the consistency, and the referral to appropriate authorities are being extremely well handled in this province under the leadership of the Ministry of Health Promotion.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to speak today in the Legislature on our opposition day motion. It's a regrettable day in the Legislature when it takes an opposition day motion to point out that a minister in the Liberal government, specifically the Minister of Health Promotion, isn't doing her job of protecting the health of all Ontarians.

There's a carefully crafted biography that said the minister will "champion health and wellness for all Ontarians." The issue before us today is about the illegal smoke shop in Caledonia, but I'm sure there are other illegal smoke shops out there. Why we're subjecting those children to illegal cigarette sales and why we are not protecting them is clearly a double standard. In the past few months the Minister of Health Promotion has avoided questions about this matter. She has pushed it off to other ministers, like the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Actually, it's five times that she has pushed it off to other ministers. I just don't know when the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services became the Minister of Health Promotion as well.

The Minister of Health Promotion did a statement on April 10—"Does anyone really believe that it is somehow acceptable for cigarettes to be mixed with Twizzlers and hockey cards for the benefit of young consumers?" That is a good question. Let me ask the minister this, and let me hope the minister reads Hansard. The question was, does anyone really believe that it is somehow acceptable for schoolchildren to be subject to the pressures of smoking illegal, hazardous products being sold just metres from their school without proper identification? They're hazardous, they're not labelled, and who knows what is in them? Who knows where they've come from? We provided clear examples of where there are serious violations to those regulations, yet no response has come forward from this government. We've asked for a late show tonight on a couple of them.

We heard excuses, and I still hear them being yelled from across, certainly avoiding responsibility. You own the property. The Ontario Realty Corp. and the provincial government own the property. Who signed the lease? Oh, wait a minute. There's an exemption—no, it was an eviction notice sent by the ministry. That was it. "No"—retracted that. It wasn't sent by the ministry. It was sent by the Six Nations. I guess we're going to find out who actually owns the property. The government hasn't denied that it's the Ontario Realty Corp., but yet they said that the Six Nations now has issued the eviction notice to the illegal smoke shop.

So it's pretty confusing. It's pretty confusing when the Ministry of Revenue's website lists numerous examples of revenue officers that have been in, seizing illegal tobacco products, including fines to convenience store owners and vendors across Ontario for not filling out the proper taxes on the tobacco products they sell. You ask a question that we asked about an illegal smoke shop in Argyle, and you can't duck that question fast enough. They just can't find the answer in the binder and they refer it off. Double standard? You bet there's a double standard.

Why is her ministry allowing an illegal smoke shop that's selling illegal cigarettes to young people without identification, not paying their fair share of provincial taxes and operating on government-owned land near both an elementary and a high school in Caledonia? Not only has this government got its head in the sand in allowing this to happen; they are facilitating it, because it's on crown land. They are not taking responsibility, and it's shocking. We've brought this up so many times. It's clearly improper action. They're clearly avoiding the issue.

It boggles my mind to think that on April 1 we asked the first opposition question to the Minister of Health Promotion. Her ministry spends millions of taxpayers' dollars on poster campaigns, photo ops, running here and running there. But you ask her about the illegal smoke shop in Caledonia and the health of those children that are pressured—underage children; selling hazardous products to them—you ask what she is doing for their health and safety: Back away. No answer.

Thirty per cent or more of the cigarettes in Ontario are illegal, but they don't want to hear about that. They just want to hear about the stats of how many health promotion kits they've handed out and how many vendors they've talked to.

1630

We are telling you about an illegal smoke shop, selling illegal, hazardous cigarettes. Evidence is brought up all the time by the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. We have many stories. We're giving you the information to help protect these young people and all the people in Caledonia, and you are ignoring it.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal wouldn't answer the question of whether the taxpayers are receiving rent from taxpayer-owned property managed by the Liberal government. Are they receiving rent? They didn't send the eviction notice. Somebody else sent an eviction notice now, and it goes on.

Minister Best's response to a question by my colleague from Thornhill was quite pathetic. She made no attempt to answer him correctly and simply read a prepared briefing note, and that was from the Standard Freeholder from Cornwall. That was the quote about their interpretation of Minister Best's non-answer. In media scrums she kept referring to stupid.ca. Isn't that a great website name, stupid.ca? You'd link right to the Liberal government, I'm sure, with that click of the button. Maybe there should be a doublestandard.ca. I'm sure that will get a lot of hits from the people in Ontario. But the minister is silent when asked why she was allowing, even

facilitating, the sale of this illegal, life-threatening product to schoolchildren and why on earth hard-working, taxpaying convenience store operators are being subjected to this double standard that the minister is forcing on them, while illegal smoke shops are getting away with this tax-free partnership sponsored by the Minister of Revenue and the Minister of Health Promotion.

It's clear that this Liberal government and the ministers will never put principles first, never ahead of political opportunity. That is just what they are doing, neglecting their responsibility in this manner, and they should be ashamed.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Certainly the NDP is in favour of health promotion initiatives and measures that will help people quit smoking and prevent other people from picking up the habit. We all know that the availability of cheap cigarettes is something that is counterproductive to helping people quit smoking. Although some progress has been made toward smoking rates, I have Health Canada stats here that say that smoking rates among young people have dropped significantly, from 28% in 1999 to 15% in 2007. But still about 90,000 Ontario youth try smoking each year, and we know that youth are the part of the population that is most sensitive to cheap cigarettes.

We also know that smoking rates among aboriginal youth are three times higher. I want to talk a little bit about tobacco and aboriginal youth. I'm not of aboriginal descent, but I know that when First Nations people pray, they pray to the south and give thanks to cedar, which is one of the sacred elements they got from Mother Earth. Cedar keeps sickness away, helps them to be physically and mentally healthy and prevents them from getting sick. They will pray to the east and give thanks to another sacred element, which is tobacco. Tobacco is used to give thanks—thanks for the food, thanks for the family, thanks for everything that makes them happy. They will pray to the west and then the sacred element is sage. Sage is used to chase away negativity. If you have fallen sick, you can certainly use sage to bring healing back. When they pray to the north, they use sweet grass, and sweet grass brings the mind as one. First Nations people will use the four elements from Mother Earth—cedar, tobacco, sage and sweet grass—and do smudge ceremonies, which are really sacred and in which tobacco is used as one of the sacred elements.

I went through this because I want everybody to understand that the relationship between the First Nations and tobacco is different from the relationship most of us would have with tobacco. So when you look at health promotion initiatives for First Nations, you have to realize that this cultural link between tobacco and First Nations is sacred, which means that the health promotion initiative for First Nations regarding smoking cessation has to be culturally appropriate.

I was really taken aback and saddened by some of the comments from the health promotion minister last week. When asked about smoking cessation for aboriginals, she answered, basically, that the strategy that had been put in place for all of Ontario was good for all of the people in Ontario. My response to this is that the smoking rate among aboriginal youth is three times the national average. Although the rest of the people are being helped by the smoking cessation strategy, it's not working with the First Nations. The First Nations have to have culturally appropriate intervention if we want them to be successful.

I'd like to give a few more stats about the health of the First Nations. First of all, First Nations are only 2% of the Ontario population. It's not a big group, but the aboriginal population has increased 45% over the last decade, which is eight times the rate of the non-native population—a big difference. The median age of Canadian aboriginal people is 27 years, compared to 40 years for non-natives, and almost half of the aboriginal population are under the age of 25. We're talking about a very young population.

There are fewer and fewer First Nations people living on reserves. About 40% of them live on reserves. It has been declining as most First Nations decide to live in urban areas.

The life expectancy of First Nations people is five to seven years lower than non-natives. Infant mortality is 1.5 times higher. One of the statistics that always hurts when I mention it, if that wasn't enough, is that the rate of suicide is 2.5 times higher. Then, when you look at youth suicide, you're talking about eight times higher for First Nations girls and five times higher for First Nations boys. Everybody knows that suicide is 100% preventable.

Talk about HIV/AIDS: 15% of new HIV/AIDS infection is in First Nations people. Remember, I said they make up 2% of the population of Ontario. They make up 15% of HIV/AIDS new cases.

Compared to the general population, their heart disease is 1.5 times higher and type 2 diabetes 3.5 times higher. Tuberculosis: We don't see much tuberculosis outside of First Nations. Well, you see 10 times more of it in First Nations than anywhere else.

I wanted to go through some of those statistics, not to cheer anybody up, obviously, because there is nothing cheerful in this. It was really to show what happens when people are marginalized and when people are racialized. They get sicker and all of the determinants of health fall apart. You can see, in all of the indicators of health, that things are not working.

My colleague Gilles Bisson talked about the schools that young aboriginal children used to have to attend. The name of the schools escapes me right now. The young children were taken away from their parents and put into those—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Residential schools.

1640

M^me^ France Gélinas: —into the residential schools. Thank you to the member. And that happened for three generations. What happened was that First Nations people did not know how to be parents because the only parents they have ever known are the people who abused

them, beat them and neglected them in residential schools.

Right now, the First Nations people growing up are the first ones who are growing up with their parents. Their parents, who had no parents to raise them up, who were raised in residential schools, become a case study for what happens when you are marginalized and racialized.

It is no surprise to me that the health promotion efforts that have been put forward have not been successful with the First Nations. We have to do it another way. We have to be a lot more culturally sensitive to their needs if we intend to be successful.

The type of motion that came forward is a motion, as I said at the beginning, that looks quite promising. Everybody wants the laws of Ontario to be upheld, and everybody wants to support a law that will have a good health-promotion outcome; that is, to ban cheap sales of cigarettes and illegal sales of cigarettes. But at the same time, to link this to Caledonia may do more harm than good to the First Nations people.

I live in Sudbury. It's a fairly big city, about 180,000 people, and we have a very tough time trying to keep a pharmacy open 24/7. We don't have any restaurants open 24/7, unless you count Tim Hortons as a restaurant; they're a coffee shop. Very few services are open 24/7. But do you know what we do have 24/7? An illegal bootlegger who will sell you any booze you want, any illegal cigarettes you want and any drugs you want. Those are open 24/7. They're within a two-minute walk to the police station and very close to the fire hall as well. For added convenience, they now have a drive-through so you can pick up your drugs, your illegal cigarettes or your booze without having to get out of your car. This is happening in downtown Sudbury, a two-minute walk from the police station.

The point of this is not that I support it—no, absolutely not; those should be shut down. The point I'm trying to make is that it is not necessarily a First Nations issue. To name Caledonia in this proposed motion is really to do a disservice to people who are already marginalized and racialized in our community.

I had the opportunity to attend the Chiefs of Ontario health planning forum. The Chiefs of Ontario were here last week and they were talking about health. They recognize that the burden of illness on their community is not sustainable and it is not healthy, and they want to change it. In order to change it, they decided to write A Health Vision for the Future. I thought I would share that with you, because it will put a few things into perspective as to how First Nations chiefs view their vision of health. So, here it goes:

"I am a great-grandmother. I am 70 now. I am fortunate to see this time. I am in my home; my eldest son, my granddaughter and her newborn daughter are visiting. I am holding this beautiful girl; she is healthy, happy, loved and protected.

"The connection is powerful, my vision realized. My son is a healer; he uses his hands, movement of the body, teaching ways of thinking and feeling ancient medicine to heal, for health and wellness. My granddaughter is in her internship; the people already call her Doctor.

"And my great-granddaughter, who are you? What is your gift? Your purpose? There have been changes over the years. We are happy in our community. We use the energy of the sun and wind for light and warmth. We have clean water and land for all of us, including the plants, birds and animals we depend on for sustenance. We live in healthy homes and families. We take care of ourselves and each other."

That was the Chiefs of Ontario's A Health Vision for the Future. I thought I would share that with you because the Chiefs of Ontario realize that a lot of the ailments that their people are struggling with also have an economic base. They quickly make the link between the people who make less than $20,000, the families that live on less than $20,000 a year, and they had all of the statistics as to the increased rate of strokes, heart attacks, diabetes. In order for them to be healthy, all of this has to change, and certainly the rate of tobacco use has to change or those deadly statistics will keep on going.

They also talk about the unrest within their community. This brings me back to the Tories' motion. Although Mr. Runciman—I'm supposed to call him by his riding.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Leeds–Grenville.

M^me^ France Gélinas: —Leeds–Grenville—the leader of the official opposition, has a goal to get rid of illegal cigarettes—and I think this is a goal that we can support—at the same time, he's very adamant that the laws of Ontario have to be applied and he uses that as an argument to shut down the illegal smoke shacks. When you talk to the people of First Nations communities, they are also very interested in having the laws of this province apply to their communities.

My leader has stood in this assembly many times and asked, "When is this government going to respect the First Nations by making sure that we do negotiation, communication and consultation before mining rights are given?" We all know that that led nowhere. We now have the people of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug in jail because they opposed the Platinex exploration on their land. Yet the duty to consult by this government was not respected.

We, as the people of Ontario, have signed many treaties with the First Nations that we are not willing to respect. Over the years, we have never respected them, or only respected them when it suited our purposes. And now we are not happy when the young people—remember, half of the aboriginal populations are young people, full of energy, full of ideas, who want to change the world, who are proud to be First Nations, who want their rights recognized, like we want the laws of Ontario recognized throughout. Those people are young and those people are restless.

If we fan the flame of discrimination, racialization and marginalization, we will get more of the same. We will get more of the deadly statistics I read to you. We will get more unrest. We want the First Nations people to be

healthy and to be proud to be part of Ontario. In order to do this, we have to start to respect the treaties that we have written and respect the First Nations communities.

1650

I am afraid that in the motion, our duty to respect is a little bit undermined when we start to name a particular area, when we start to name a particular First Nation. I would feel much more comfortable if we were to take this out and name the illegal smoke shop in downtown Sudbury. I would be ready to support this any day. I hate the place. It brings lots of heartache to a lot of people in Sudbury. When I was the executive director of the community health centre, I saw life after life being turned for the worse because of this illegal shop. But it's still there. I would like it in the motion. That would make me feel good. But that's not what we read. We read about First Nations and we read about Caledonia and we read about Six Nations and that fans the flames that don't need any fanning right now, or any time soon thereafter.

I'm not up to date on procedures, so I asked some of my colleagues if we could do a friendly amendment to this thing and take out the paragraph that talks about Caledonia. I'm ready to stick Sudbury in there, with my example, if they want an example. But it wouldn't be an example to do with the First Nations. Remember, I said First Nations are 2% of our population. Let's put an example in there that talks about 98% of the population. Then I would be a lot more comfortable with the whole thing. As I said, the NDP is very engaged in bringing in health promotion measures, and we will support health promotion measures coming from any of the parties because we believe in medicare and we believe that—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Including Conservatives?

M^me^ France Gélinas: Including Conservatives, of course—all parties. If any party brings forward a health promotion initiative, we would be happy to support it. We understand the important role that health promotion will play in keeping medicare healthy. Medicare is at the core of what defines us as Ontarians and as Canadians. It is something that is very much cherished by the NDP—and by everybody—and something we want to keep. We see that one of the best strategies to make sure that medicare is there for years to come is to support health promotion and disease prevention efforts.

In this motion, there is this thing that appeals to me, that pulls my heart strings: A health promotion piece that I would really like us to support. Unfortunately, at the same time, it has this flame of dissension, of racialization, of marginalization that I can't support. Don't focus on 2% of our population, the First Nations; focus on all of Ontario. We want all of the illegal smoke shops to disappear. I particularly want the one in Sudbury to disappear. That would make me really happy.

We want all of the laws in Ontario to be upheld for everybody. That means respecting the treaties; that means respecting the law that says illegal cigarettes should not be manufactured, sold or available. We all know, as with illegal drugs and illegal cigarettes, winning this battle will not be through law enforcement. Law enforcement is one piece of the puzzle.

The winning piece will be what you do to curtail demand. We all know basic business: supply and demand. The supply of illegal cigarettes and illegal drugs is there because there's a demand for it. The more work you invest into decreasing the demand, the easier it will be to get rid of those illegal smoke shops. There won't be anybody left wanting to buy those illegal products because you will have a generation of Ontarians who want to be healthy and who don't want to buy those illegal products anymore. This will be done through strong health promotion measures. As I said, when it comes to First Nations, it will have to be culturally targeted health promotion measures in order to work. Sure, I would like to get rid of all of the illegal smoke shops in operation in Ontario. I would like all of the laws in Ontario to be applied equally to every single Ontarian. I would like people—everybody—to quit smoking and none of our youth to pick up the habit. That's what we should be aiming for.

The way it reads now, I'm happy through one part and unhappy through the rest of it. I guess that's the way things go sometimes. I guess, Mr. Speaker, we're not allowed to make changes to the motion as it reads now, like amendments and stuff?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): No, the standing orders do not provide for amendments on opposition day motions, to clarify.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I see that the clock is running out. Basically, I'm happy to see that the member from the official opposition has brought forward a piece of health promotion that is of great significance to youth throughout Ontario, because they are the ones who are most tempted by cheap cigarettes. They are the age group the most at risk, and basically the biggest customers of cheap cigarettes are youth. I'm certainly happy that the member of the opposition has brought that forward and would be happy to support it. Unfortunately, because they have targeted a First Nations community, they have targeted that 2% of Ontarians that make up the First Nations. That, to me, is fanning a flame that doesn't need any fanning right now. That part makes me really uncomfortable. Those are my comments.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It was interesting to listen to the member from Nickel Belt. Indeed, it was an interesting talk and subject. I definitely learned a lot about the culture, the heritage and the religions of aboriginal people who live in the province of Ontario.

But the issue here is to talk about the motion before us today, that was brought by the Leader of the Opposition. I read this motion—this troubling motion. This motion has two sides, two colours. It's like a watermelon: It looks green from the outside, but red on the inside. The appearance is that the member opposite is fighting for health promotion and trying to fight the illegal sales of tobacco in the province of Ontario. But I believe, like many who spoke before me, that the intent of this bill is to provoke the relationship between the aboriginal people and the mainstream community, especially in Caledonia.

For some reason, for some time the opposition party has been trying to create trouble, specifically about the activity around Caledonia. As you know, for the last two years this issue has been brought to the House on many different occasions and in different fashions. Today, the Leader of the Opposition brought it in a cover of smoking, tobacco, health promotion and many different aspects. But the intent was to provoke the Caledonia people and the aboriginal people.

Indeed, I never smoked in my life. I never liked smoking and I cannot be in a room with people smoking. Therefore, it's not about cigarettes, it's not about illegal tobacco and it's not about illegal shops. I believe all members of this House, from the opposition, from the government party and from the third party, agree that illegal tobacco should be stopped. Therefore, we have enforcement officers and we have a health unit that inspects stores on a regular basis to make sure nobody sells illegal tobacco. They impose a bigger fine on any shop that sells that tobacco.

In my old capacity, I was a distributor for many different variety stores across the province of Ontario. I know many shops would never participate in these activities, because they know they can get fined the first time, and the second time they would be banned from selling cigarettes. As you know, the revenue from the cigarettes is a great deal for them. They cannot afford to lose that ability to sell cigarettes. So I don't know what the member is talking about.

1700

Everybody from the NDP and from the government side noticed clearly that the Leader of the Opposition was creating some kind of wedge between the ministry and the aboriginal community. It's not the way we can solve problems.

I listened to the NDP members and the government side. They're talking about relationships. They're talking about our government approach. They're talking about the Ministry of Health Promotion, how many different times it came with different strategies to promote a healthy and smoke-free Ontario. All these approaches were done in a professional manner. This is the way we in Ontario deal with people, not by forcing, not by creating trouble.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak, and I want to leave some time for my colleagues to express their voices and their concerns about the opposite members.

Mr. Peter Shurman: How can any member in any party in this House not vote for this resolution? All it says is that we're going to uphold the law. I remember being sworn in and swearing that I would uphold the law. That's all the bottom line of this resolution says.

My interest in the contraband cigarette trade related to my Korean constituents originally. It began that way because in my constituency we do round tables. Some of them are ethnic-based, and I find out what the unique problems are for particular communities. I discovered that the Koreans have this particular problem because many are involved in the convenience store business. Koreans are obviously a newcomer group, 10 to 20 years at most, with us here in the GTA. They're industrious, they're hard-working, they have incredible family values and they are interested in making it, but they want to make it in law-abiding businesses. They sell a legal product, cigarettes, but they don't want their kids to smoke. They are not opposed to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. They are opposed to selective application of that act, and so am I. That's what this resolution speaks to. In fact, as law-abiding citizens, Koreans don't like any group evading the rule of law on any issue. Again, I have to say I concur.

I am firmly opposed to imbalance, opposed to uneven application of the law, and I would like to think that in this chamber we all are. My questions in this House over the past number of weeks, indeed the past couple of months, have been non-stop on this issue. It even got me ejected from this House one day. My questions have been to the Minister of Health Promotion, the Minister of Revenue, the Minister of Small Business and even the Premier. My interest began with my Korean constituents, but it is now not limited to my Korean constituents.

Tobacco enforcement is very rough on small business: "Get the walls up, hide the cigarettes, don't display them with Twizzlers and hockey cards," as the Minister of Health Promotion stated one day in this House—no extension of the deadline. Fifty per cent of those stores cannot be ready because specifications for the divider walls were not even issued until January 31. "That's too bad," says the McGuinty government, "We want to protect our kids." I say stop hiding behind the kids. We all want to protect our kids, there's no question about that. It doesn't matter where in the province they live or who they are.

The government wants to be seen to be doing the right thing, but our kids are not being protected. Why not? Because they don't need convenience store cigarettes when illicit cigarettes are readily available on the street in strip-mall parking lots or in smoke shacks, just like the one on Argyle Street in Caledonia. And, for all of the eloquent speakers this afternoon to know, that is simply an example, it's not targeting First Nations. The resolution doesn't say so, and that's not what it does.

Some of these come to the illicit market via First Nations, it's true; others through criminal activity. So the NDP's concerns about First Nations, while germane to the issue of First Nations, are not specific to this motion. They're not contained in this motion. This is about illicit tobacco.

We know through a study commissioned via the Ontario Convenience Stores Association that the use of contraband cigarettes is rampant in high schools. They collected discarded butts and analyzed them. Some 23% of high school smoking in Toronto is illicit contraband tobacco, and up to the 40% range in places like Mississauga and Newmarket. Does anyone really care about the health of these kids?

Why can't Ontario control the contraband cigarette and tobacco trade? In Ontario, we know that contraband

cigarette sales are now above 37% of all cigarette sales. And by the way, if you care about tax revenues, that equates to $600 million lost to Ontario taxpayers. We foot the bill. Estimates say that that number will rise to 50% by 2010 if left unchecked, and all indications are that it will be left unchecked.

So who's getting hurt? The convenience store operators; all taxpayers in Ontario who pick up the tab for that $600 million in lost revenue and related health costs down the road due to smoking, now and in the future; and our kids, who are not only smoking illegal product but untested garbage for a dollar a package coming in from China. Who knows what's even in that?

I can't see how any reasonable member of this House cannot support this resolution, because as I've said, it is about the upholding of the law, something we're sworn to do. All it says in this resolution is that, "The Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the McGuinty government to move immediately to shut down all illegal smoke shops in Ontario and prosecute vendors of illegal cigarettes to the fullest extent of the law." And you're going to vote against that.

Why do we even need a resolution to uphold the rule of law? This is the law. Isn't the government supposed to uphold it? But this government is not upholding the law. I have personally spoken to uniformed enforcement officers, tobacco enforcement officers—and there are 300 of them in this province—who have told me that the policy is hands off. Why hands off? "Well, we don't want to start a war." If that is true, is the government ready to admit it and explain why? And if this is hands-off policy and it's causing injury to our young people and others, how can the government maintain that it is acting to protect young people in dealing with convenience stores?

Convenience stores are not the problem. Convenience stores are ready to toe the line. They need a bit of time to put the walls up, but that's not going to change anything about the 37%—and rising—of sales across Ontario of illicit tobacco. The major conundrum is not understood by Ontarians.

They have this problem in British Columbia. They have it as well as we do, but they enforce things in British Columbia better, I suppose, than they do in Ontario, because the percentage of tobacco that is contraband in the province of British Columbia, that gets into the consumers' hands, is 5%. In Ontario, it's a 37% problem and it's spiralling upward.

I expect everyone here to vote for this simple resolution because all it does is call upon the government to do what is mandated for the government to do, what is right, and that is to enforce the law.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I thought it was very important that I have an opportunity to speak to this opposition day motion. I have a few points I want to make about the comments that have been made by the mover of the motion, Mr. Runciman, from Leeds–Grenville, with respect to the fact that this is a health issue, and that would be the motivation on the part of the opposition for bringing it for debate today.

What I would say is that that puzzles me a little bit. In the year 2006, this government introduced the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. This was an act that would prohibit smoking in all public places. We thought that was a very important piece of legislation. It was something that the Ontario Medical Association and activists for many years had promoted. That was a bill that was voted against by the members of the Conservative caucus. So when we talk about this being a health issue, I'm really rather confused in terms of how it is that today we're talking about how—and our government would agree that tobacco products in the province cost Ontarians significantly. That is why we introduced the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, and I don't know why the members opposite did not support it.

1710

I would say as well that since the passage of the bill, our government has committed $60 million to tobacco cessation programs. That's 600% more than was spent by the government previous to ours on smoking cessation programs. Again, I say to the members opposite that they voted against the budget that contained that $60 million.

Also with respect to focusing resources for young people, having them understand why it is important that they not take up smoking, why they should not smoke, we launched the $25-million stupid.ca program. I know some members on the opposition benches make light of that program, but there have been literally thousands of hits on that website. It is a very worthy tool to have our youth understand why they should not smoke. Again, they voted against the $25 million dedicated to that program focused on youth.

Our government, since coming to office, has hired 143 enforcement officers at public health units. These 143 officers, since they've been hired, have laid 6,000 charges. We think that's a good thing. That's why they were hired.

Interjection.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: A member opposite is saying, "Put them to work." We certainly have faith in the public servants who work for the province of Ontario, and we believe they do a very good job on behalf of the people of the province. The dollars that we have used to hire those health enforcement officers—members of the opposition voted against the budget that incorporated those additional dollars to hire them.

I would also say that with respect to focusing on children and the health of children and what's important for children, our Premier has made a commitment that this government will act to protect children in cars and will bring into the House legislation that will prevent adults, when there are children in cars, from smoking. I would say to the members opposite who say they are very concerned about the exposure of young people to cigarettes and cigarette products, I certainly would expect them to wholeheartedly and enthusiastically support any move that this government would take to protect children in cars when there are smokers in cars.

I will conclude by saying that—as I read the motion that is presented here today, it is calling upon "the

McGuinty government to move immediately to shut down all illegal smoke shops"—our government has great trust and faith in the law enforcement officers in this province, whether they're police or health unit employees. I believe they make decisions in the best interests of people, the community, wherever there is this kind of activity. That is the position of this government. We don't direct police. We don't direct health unit officers. We provide the legislation to enable them to ensure that the communities where people live and work remain safe. That is the commitment of this government. I believe we can demonstrate very clearly that the health of children has been a priority and the safety of people in this province has been a priority.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to stand today in support of the motion put forward by our leader, Bob Runciman, with regard to illegal smoke shacks in the province of Ontario. The sale of illegal cigarettes is what this motion is all about.

I respect greatly the passion that I heard from members of the NDP today with regard to their concerns with First Nations issues. There's nobody in this House, and certainly nobody who has been awake in the province of Ontario, who would argue against the fact that there have been tremendous injustices perpetrated against First Nations peoples historically. But we're not going to redress those today; we do have negotiations ongoing, and they have been going on for some time, that are supposed to address those problems and that issue. We support that, but that is not what we are talking about today. We are talking about the operation of illegal smoke shacks in the province of Ontario.

With respect to the member for Nickel Belt, she talked about a smoke shop in Sudbury. I'm not aware of that smoke shop, but I can tell you that this motion would shut it down, because it touches on all illegal smoke shops. So if she wants to support this motion, we can look at that smoke shop in Sudbury. I've never been there—I've been to Sudbury, but I've never been to that illegal smoke shop for smokes, alcohol or otherwise. When something like that is operating and breaking the law, we in the Progressive Conservative Party would be in favour of shutting it down, because we believe in respect for the law, respect for the law by everyone, and that everyone is equal under the law.

So our position on the smoke shops—now, we do mention a smoke shop in Caledonia. There's a very specific reason for mentioning that one in particular: because it operates on land owned by the province of Ontario. If the government of Ontario is not going to enforce the law on its own land, then I guess we can't expect them to enforce the law anywhere else. If that is the kind of government that we have, one that will allow illegal activity on their land, then they are shirking and reneging on their responsibility not just to the people of Caledonia and not just to the people in Haldimand county, but to all the people of the province of Ontario. You have a responsibility as government to enforce the law on your land.

Let's talk about the bigger picture. Let's talk about the health of children. I am appalled that the Minister of Health Promotion would have this kind of attitude toward the health of our children.

I know that the government likes to talk about those who didn't support the Smoke-Free Ontario Act; I was one of those six Progressive Conservatives who voted against it—not because I'm in favour of smoke, because those people who know me and know me in my private life know that I'm one of the most adamant anti-smoking people they know. But I couldn't support that bill because of components in it. In our home, in our family of four children, ages 28 to 16, none of them smoke. Do you know what my kids say? They say, "Dad, you just have to be stupid if you smoke. You just have to be dumb." I don't disagree with my kids. That's the way they were raised: that smoking is unhealthy, there's no reason for it, and they don't participate in that.

But not everybody has the same feelings toward it. When we have a smoke shop operating within metres of a school, accessible by our children, our most vulnerable people, and this government feels it has no responsibility to shut that down, then something is wrong. If they can't make the health and the protection of children from those who would try to entice them into doing something that is extremely unhealthy for them—not only unhealthy if you're buying the du Maurier cigarettes, but how much more unhealthy if you're buying illegal, contraband cigarettes, and we don't have any idea what chemicals might be in them? All tobacco is unhealthy. We all accept that; we all believe that. Even those in this House who smoke would agree that tobacco is unhealthy. But how much more unhealthy is tobacco that comes from questionable sources? It could have chemicals in there that we've already banned in this country. But how do you know? They're not tested. They're not inspected at the border. They come through the border illegally, now we allow them to be sold at a smoke shack within metres of a school, and this government says: "That's not our problem."

1720

Well, if I were a member of the government, I would make it our problem, because the health of our children, the protection of our children, is a priority that none of us can ignore—not if you're in opposition, not if you're in government and not if you're a citizen of this province. You can't ignore the importance of the health of our children.

We're allowing an activity to go on and, by the looks of it, this government is encouraging it. They're giving tacit approval to it. When you will not stand and enforce the law, you are in fact telling those people who break the law that you're not concerned about it. That is a terrible message to send to criminals. When you turn a blind eye to law-breaking, you in fact give tacit approval to that law-breaking.

In my opinion, this government has failed in its responsibility. This shack is well known to them. I have to repeat that it doesn't operate on a piece of private

property that Joe Blow owns and has a fence around and has told the people, "Just step on my property and there'll be a price to pay." No. It operates on land owned by the province of Ontario. They might as well fly an Ontario flag. Maybe they should have a picture of the Premier on the wall of the smoke shack. They've got the approval of the government. I've got to believe that we live in a province where, if you're breaking the law, the government is going to move in and stop you from breaking the law.

I'm running out of time here. I know my colleague from Niagara West–Glanbrook wants to speak, so I am going to urge all the members in this House: You have an opportunity today to stand up for children in this province. I urge you to do so.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this particular motion.

Despite the assertions made on this motion, this government is committed to combating the problem of illegal cigarettes. Since October 2003, Ontario has taken many steps to attack illegal contraband cigarette sales, including the Tobacco Tax Act. Convictions under the act have doubled between 2005 and 2007. Over the past two years, Ministry of Revenue investigators have seized millions of contraband cigarettes, untaxed cigars and large quantities of fine-cut tobacco.

In reality, our government has strengthened enforcement against contraband tobacco four times since taking office—four times. Both parties sitting opposite voted against increasing enforcement four times. The role of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, through the Ontario Provincial Police, is to ensure that the community and its residents are safe. In fact, in the last month alone, the OPP have confiscated over $1 million worth of contraband tobacco.

Our government is proud of the work being done by the fine women and men of the OPP. It is nevertheless true that our government does not interfere with the operational decisions of the OPP or any other police service in Ontario. We take the recommendations from the Linden report very seriously. We are very clear on recommendation 71. Let me take this opportunity to share recommendation 71 with all members of this House:

"The power of the responsible minister to direct the OPP does not include directions regarding specific law enforcement decisions in individual cases ... the commissioner of the OPP has operational responsibility with respect to the control of the OPP."

All members of this Legislature are fully aware of this well-established division between public policy and operational matters. When the members opposite suggest that we should direct the OPP or any other police force, I am reminded of what was said by the leader opposite, the honourable member who brought this motion, when he was the Solicitor General and minister of corrections. Let me quote the then minister in Hansard:

"I've indicated, and the Premier's indicated, that in past instances, in dealing with different issues, this government, this ministry, the Premier's office and, I assume, former governments did in no way, shape or form involve themselves in day-to-day police operations in this province. That has continued to be the case throughout the tenure of our government and I trust it will continue to be the case as the years roll on with governments of a variety of political stripes." That is the current House leader saying this on May 30, 1996.

We have full confidence in the police across the province, and we would hope that the opposition shared this confidence. Let me remind the members that it is the primary responsibility of the federal government to protect Canadians from cross-border smuggling, including tobacco smuggling. The RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency are the two federal agencies responsible for matters related to cross-border smuggling.

The RCMP is the lead agency that manages Canada's integrated border enforcement teams, known as IBETs. The OPP is a strong partner in the work of these teams targeting cross-border criminal activity like tobacco smuggling. These teams enable law enforcement agencies in the US and Canada to ensure that our borders are secure and open for legitimate business. These teams are a major enforcement success. In addition, last week, law enforcement officials in eastern Ontario announced that they are joining forces to crack down on speeders, contraband tobacco smugglers and impaired drivers on the region's roads and highways. This partnership will consist of the OPP, the Ministry of Transportation, the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency.

We know that enforcement and tax policies alone are not enough. We know that smoking cessation is key to long-term success. The McGuinty government has been aggressively implementing smoking cessation programs since taking office. The Smoke-Free Ontario Act has been hugely successful. Our colleague Minister Best confirmed that tobacco consumption in Ontario fell by 31.8% from 2003 to 2006. That equals over 4.6 billion fewer cigarettes.

I would be remiss if I did not talk about cessation programs in my community in the city of Ottawa. The Ottawa public health department cessation programming in 2007-08, in partnership with the Ministry of Health Promotion and the University of Ottawa health institute, has developed a hospital-based smoking cessation program which identifies and treats tobacco users admitted to the hospital. The program was piloted in 17 hospitals in the Champlain local health integration network in 2006-07. Due to the success of the program, it was expanded to 10 additional hospitals across the province. Through our Youth Action Alliance program, tobacco awareness campaigns in the Ottawa area are also under operation, currently providing counselling, brief intervention and self-help in all high schools. With a physician's note, youths gain access to nicotine replacement therapy at reduced cost.

Our government believes that reducing the demand for tobacco is crucial. Although some people may be concerned with lost tax revenue from illegal cigarettes, our

government is concerned with lost lives from all cigarettes.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise and join the debate in support of the opposition day motion standing in the name of Mr. Runciman from Leeds–Grenville.

Let me start out by citing a recent article in the Niagara This Week of April 4, 2008, entitled "Cheap Contraband Cigarettes Pouring into Niagara." Mr. Forsyth's article begins: "They're being sold at factory gates, from vans parked next to schools and even in variety stores. They're illegal cigarettes, and they're pouring into Niagara and across Ontario from native reserves in Ontario, Quebec and New York State." That was the message that Michael Perley, director of the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco, brought when he visited with municipal leaders in Niagara.

The article reports that "Perley said the massive amounts of illegal cigarettes pouring into Ontario are delivering a serious setback to anti-tobacco steps taken in the province...." Mr. Perley also estimates that this is costing the provincial treasury some $600 million per year in lost revenues because it's going into the so-called black market.

1730

The problem as well is that this is encouraging more young people to take up smoking. First of all, they don't have to go through a licensed place, which would have to check their identification. Secondly, I suspect that those who are selling them from illegal smoke shacks or out of the back of a car or from a van outside of a school aren't exactly checking the identification of the kids buying these cigarettes. Third, these products are dirt cheap. It's encouraging more young people to take up this habit. The article goes on to say:

"There are legal cigarette-making businesses on reserves that are provincially and federally licensed and exempt from taxes for natives, but Perley said many of those cigarettes—with pink plastic seals versus yellow for smokes that duties have been paid on—are ending up on the illegal market."

Mr. Perley estimates that one in three cigarettes in Niagara comes through the black market. The government tries to boast that they have reduced smoking by 25% to 30%.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Just the legal sales.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague from Renfrew notes it correctly, that probably the legal sales have gone down by 25% or 30%, and I bet that, and more, now has gone into the illegal tobacco trade—up to 40%, by some estimates.

I represent Niagara West–Glanbrook, so areas like upper Stoney Creek, Binbrook, Mount Hope as well as parts of Niagara. So we're very close to the illegal cigarette shack that is referenced in the motion and by my colleagues next to that school in Caledonia. We're the neighbouring riding. It's gone from being legend to commonplace. People will regularly drive either to that illegal cigarette shack or its partner shacks in the area to purchase illegal tobacco and cigarette products. People talk very openly about it. It's almost like the days when people would talk about how they'd smuggle things across the border, under the watchful eyes of the customs officers. But now there's no check. As my colleague from Thornhill has said many times, the tobacco control officers have been told to keep their hands off. The McGuinty government has told its own officers, the tax collectors and those that make sure that cigarettes are always sold to those who are of age through licensed establishments to look the other way when it comes to these illegal operations.

It is sad too that government policy seems to be suggesting that a way to prosperity for some is to get engaged in the illegal tobacco industry. By not cracking down on illegal operators, the government is sending a signal that you can get rich quick by engaging in these types of activities. If the enforcement officers aren't pursuing them, then that is going to encourage more people to get into the supply of this business.

Let's look at some of the prices. A carton of 200 no-name cigarettes in a clear plastic bag with a twist tie, with a lighter thrown in, costs anywhere from $6 to $8. If you were to purchase cigarettes through a legitimate operation, you'd pay roughly $10 a pack or $80 a carton for brand name cigarettes. No wonder more young people are taking up the habit, and no wonder more people are moving to these illegal cigarette shacks that the government chooses to ignore.

There is also a system, which I think we all know, in how marked and unmarked cigarettes are to operate. Marked cigarettes or packages of cigarettes, cartons and cases that are marked with a stamp would then come, as required, under the Tobacco Tax Act. Unmarked or unregistered cigarettes do not have a yellow tear tape. On-reserve retailers who are authorized by the Minister of Revenue to purchase unmarked cigarettes must sell them only to aboriginals. It is illegal to sell unmarked cigarettes to non-aboriginals. Retailers who have been authorized to purchase unmarked cigarettes may not possess more than the allocated number they are authorized to purchase.

To avoid the abuse of the tax-exempt system, since late 1993, the Ontario government has implemented a quota system to limit the amount of tax on tobacco products sold to reserves. But, sadly, under the McGuinty government the system seems to have broken down, with no follow-up or inspection to combat illegal tobacco shacks by the McGuinty government. They're very anxious to crack down on law-abiding small businesses, like the variety stores in my riding, but turn a blind eye to the growing illegal trade in the neighbouring riding, which is very unfortunate indeed.

I guess in some ways I should add one of my favourite topics. The government actually operates its own smoking room as well at the casinos. They would tell mom-and-pop restaurants that these activities are not allowed—no smoking in the mom-and-pop restaurants—but the government-owned casinos at Niagara Falls, Windsor and perhaps at Rama as well have what I call

Dalton McGuinty smoking palaces. No wonder the government is looking the other way when it comes to illegal cigarette shacks, because they themselves are running an operation that would not be permitted to a private sector business.

I support the attack on tobacco. We need stronger incentives to discourage tobacco use. In fact, I'd like to see the government make good on a promise and buy out existing tobacco growers in Ontario, but let's first start cracking down on these illegal operations.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have a chance to stand and speak in opposition to this opposition day motion. I have to say, having sat here this afternoon and listened to this motion, it is a simplistic approach to tackling a very challenging and difficult issue that we face across the province.

It is also one that is, I think, a desperate measure to move back to the time of divide-and-conquer politics, a role that the members opposite played in this province during the years that they had the privilege of sitting on this side of the House. It's not an avenue that this government has pursued.

We have brought forward some of the most aggressive anti-smoking legislation in North America, and on each and every occasion—whether it was supporting individuals who needed help with respect to cessation, whether it was tackling a significant issue of second-hand smoke—the members on that side of the House voted against the steps that our government was taking. So I have to say that to have this newfound desire to prevent smoking among Ontario's youth is somewhat shocking, given that, on each and every occasion, they had an opportunity to really do something about it, to help develop the programs that I can say are succeeding in my community in Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

On Friday, I had the chance to attend Lakeshore Collegiate Institute to look at the tobacco-use-reduction showcase and the artwork and projects being undertaken by the students at Lakeshore Collegiate. I have to say, I was so proud of them. The work they were doing was very graphic, very direct, and was speaking to the issue of why they and their peers should not start smoking. They were telling me about the support they've received through the Ministry of Health Promotion, through public health, which is reaching out into our schools, the information they've received on the campaign on stupid.ca, because, yes, smoking is stupid. That is the direct language and approach that we've taken, learning from that generation that seeks to ensure that they and their friends don't take up something they will regret later on.

We all know very well in this House—certainly those of us on this side of the House—that smoking kills 1,300 Ontarians and costs our health care system $1.7 billion every year. It's the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario. That's why we have been pro-active and taken steps.

We are not new to the topic we are discussing here today, but I have to say that when I had a chance to look through a reference in this motion, "Whereas one of the goals of the Ontario smoke-free strategy is 'to prevent smoking among Ontario's children, youth and young adults,'" I say, where were you? Where have you been in the past? How come you have never spoken out on this issue? And how come you have a caucus and members of the Legislature on the opposite side who voted against it? Who are they? Six Conservative MPPs voted against it. I have to say, I'm looking across at many of those members right now, and they're the very people who have just spoken to the importance of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. Where were you when we were dealing with this?

I also would suggest that if we look at the work that has been done with respect to enforcement, and we acknowledge the simplistic nature being taken in this motion that suggests that we in this Legislature should be directing actions of the police, that we should be directing crown attorneys where they should prosecute, that's not the kind of province I want to live in and that is certainly not the approach that we have ever taken on this side of the House. You perhaps, on that side of the House, have a history, a checkered past with respect to that type of enforcement. That is not what we are prepared to do. We are prepared to put our money on the table to help those who need to stop smoking and to prevent Ontario youth and others from taking up something that could ultimately result in their deaths. We are proud of the enforcement work that's being undertaken in this province.

1740

Let's take a look at the results that are being achieved by contraband tobacco enforcement. There's always more work to do. There's no one who sits on this side of the House and says that there's not more work to do with respect to enforcement, but there is work being done with respect to enforcement. Convictions under the Tobacco Tax Act, drastically low when we took office, are rising each and every year to, in 2007-08, 55 convictions. There was $1 million in product confiscated last month alone.

Work is being done in partnership with the Canada Border Services Agency, the Canada Revenue Agency, the RCMP, the OPP, the provincial and territorial governments and other municipal governments. This is a cause that we have been on for a period of time. It's one that we have been working in partnership with in terms of all of the partners that need to be at the table.

I would say to my friends opposite: Welcome to the group that cares about this issue. But your interest, your desire and the avenue that you seek to pursue, I would suggest to you, is not one that will have success ultimately and is not in the form of one that will ultimately tackle this issue head-on. That's exactly what we're doing each and every day out in communities. We're doing it in a way that will make sure that Ontarians have the support they need. We are very proud of the work that's being undertaken by all of the partners at the table. Is there more work to do? Absolutely, yes. Welcome to the party.

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to take a moment to express a couple of personal thoughts and then deal specifically,

directly and clearly with the motion that has been offered. My first thought is that I have my tobacco pouch with me in terms of keeping my health clear, my mind clear; my flint and feather as well.

The other thing that I want to say very clearly is that from the very beginning of my understanding of what smoking means, I have supported 100% the idea that Ontario could go smoke-free. My first daughter was born with a t-shirt given to her by the anti-tobacco people that said, "The first generation of non-smoking Ontarians." She's now 25 years old, and unfortunately I can't say that that generation is going smoke-free. My hope, my wish and my prayer is that all of us could kick the habit; all of us would never start.

The fact is that the science is available, contrary to a member on the other side who still questions whether or not second-hand smoke can hurt anybody. I'm saying vividly, clearly, that—

Interjections.

Mr. Dave Levac: The cackling is already starting. You can understand that they don't want to see it. I would say to the members opposite who are cackling at the moment that maybe you should talk to your own members and check it out, because it's true. It's a fact.

Unfortunately, that kind of understanding is what's leading to the type of motion we're talking about today. The fact is that this is not a motion to deal specifically with what is being talked about. There's a hidden agenda here that we need to unfold and make sure that we expose. It's clear that the NDP get it. I compliment them for understanding the very nuances of the type of dog whistle that is being blown here to cause the problems that we are now seeing in this province.

The fact is that there are two roads to take. The first road is one of conflict, which leads to confrontation, which leads to violence. The other is the road of peace. It is very difficult for peace—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm not being critical of the Chair at all, but there was a comment made which suggested racist overtones. I would ask you to review Hansard with respect to this member's comments and—perhaps today isn't appropriate, but at a future date—require that he withdraw.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It was an accusation of racism.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would caution the member for Brant with respect to his use of language and ask him if he would like to withdraw any unparliamentary language.

Mr. Dave Levac: I understand that the rules provide for an opportunity for me to ask you what issue we are specifically talking about—the words?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Exactly, and I think you do know. But it's my understanding that the Speaker has in the past cautioned members for using the term "dog whistle." I would ask him if he would withdraw.

Mr. Dave Levac: I withdraw the words "dog whistle."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I return to the member for Brant.

Mr. Dave Levac: Let me talk about that. We'll be very clear. Saying things specifically so that certain people can hear them is a difficulty. And if the message is clear on the surface, it sometimes appears very innocent, and then at other times there's a message underneath. It's called subliminal advertising; there's something underneath that we want to hear clearly. By saying those things on top, there's a message being sent underneath. The message underneath is the piece that I want to speak to.

The reality is this: When we talk about the rules of the House being applied to, we're looking at some difficult times. The road that we choose to take can be one of conflict and confrontation, which leads to violence, or we take a road that is peaceful, that explains clearly that we're going to take this in order for us to make an improvement. Here's the improvement I'm talking about.

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Levac: And the cackling starts. The cackling starts to try to say that they're the ones who are right. The member opposite who is leading the charge talked about the arrogance. So the fact is, we can't make our points without the cackling; we can't make our points and indicate to the member opposite as to why exactly we're doing this. So the member wants to continue to cackle. Well, listen to him cackle. Go right ahead.

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Levac: Go ahead; cackle. Cackle some more. Tell the people of Ontario why we can't give a rationale for supporting this or not supporting this. Quite frankly, we're not going to support this. I know I'm not going to support this. I'm not going to support this. Why? Because I live right next door, and Six Nations is in my riding. Quite frankly, we're supposed to be speaking for all people.

Here's the question: Are you aware that since October 2003, Ontario has made many steps to improve getting rid of contraband cigarettes, including the Tobacco Tax Act? Over the past two years, Ministry of Revenue investigators—at the federal level—have seized millions of dollars' worth of contraband cigarettes, untaxed cigarettes and large quantities of fine-cut tobacco. The role of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, through the province of Ontario and the OPP, is to ensure that the community and its residents are safe.

This is not the right spot for this particular motion, and I hope we all vote it down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Runciman has moved opposition motion number 2. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert	Miller, Norm	Savoline, Joyce
Barrett, Toby	Munro, Julia	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Murdoch, Bill	Shurman, Peter
Elliott, Christine	O'Toole, John	Sterling, Norman W.
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.	Yakabuski, John

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Gerretsen, John	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Gravelle, Michael	Orazietti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Broten, Laurel C.	Jaczek, Helena	Pupatello, Sandra
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Chan, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Ruprecht, Tony
Crozier, Bruce	Mangat, Amrit	Sandals, Liz
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Sergio, Mario
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	Sorbara, Greg
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Van Bommel, Maria
Duncan, Dwight	Milloy, John	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 18; the nays are 43.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to be have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

TOBACCO CONTROL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. The member has up to five minutes to debate this matter and the minister or his designate has five minutes to reply. I recognize the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: My reason for this request pursuant to standing order 37(a), which you've mentioned, is that I'm unsatisfied with the answer received to the question I posed this afternoon in the House to the Premier. The question I asked today was a very pointed and direct question. It was intended for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, but I asked the Premier, who felt it should be referred to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. It's certainly a pattern when we ask questions in the Legislature that the cabinet avoids their responsibilities and passes it off to other ministries. It's no coincidence we have two late shows tonight because there's a lack of response from these ministers. It's clear, but it's unfortunate, that hard-working Ontario taxpayers—you can't blame them for suggesting that these ministers are sitting at the cabinet table as Liberal patronage appointments. But God forbid that they actually stand up and do their duty as ministers in the government and tackle these challenging issues. I guess that's not in the job description they have in front of them.

In the past weeks both myself and my colleagues have asked a number of questions with respect to the non-smoking laws, as well as the regulations they effect on small businesses. We've provided clear examples of where there are serious violations to those regulations. No response from the government on these issues. We've heard excuses, absolutely unrelated statistics and a whole lot of rhetoric—horse feathers, as one of my colleagues likes to say.

The reason for my question to the Premier today was to clarify an important matter from the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. There is again—we've discussed this all day—a matter of an illegal smoke shop close to schools in the town of Caledonia. The illegal smoke shop is operating on crown land, land that is owned by the taxpayers of Ontario, entrusted to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal to manage in the best interests of the public. I don't think that an illegal smoke shop can be determined to be in the best interests of the public, but we've had this debate.

I was asking why the ministry is allowing an illegal smoke shop, selling illegal cigarettes to young people without identification, not paying their share of provincial tobacco taxes, operating on government-owned land, near both an elementary school and a high school in Caledonia—not only is this government allowing it to happen; they help facilitate it. It's on crown land. I guess you have to repeat, repeat and repeat. This story is getting pretty long and repetitive, but it will continue until we get some answers from this government.

I was wondering if the vendor was paying any rent to the taxpayers of Ontario for setting up the shop on this land. That was my question. That was what it was related to. Not at any point did I mention anything that would insist that the Premier refer it to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. That's the first point that baffled me.

It was a straightforward question with respect to government-owned property at Plank Road at the intersection of provincial Highway 6 and Argyle Street in Caledonia. That's the address. On that crown land there's a vendor who's operating a cigarette smoke shop. It's taxpayer-owned land. It's entrusted to the responsibility of this government over there.

I asked if he could confirm that the minister responsible was collecting rent from this particular vendor, and if not, why not? The Premier referred it to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, who never attempted to answer the

question. Then he stated incorrectly, which he later corrected, that there was an eviction notice sent by the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. He went on to discuss a number of things that had nothing to do with the question, but no answer to the question.

On the follow-up question on when the eviction notice was sent from the minister to the vendor, there was obviously no answer to that because there was no eviction notice sent from the minister to the vendor. It didn't happen. There was an eviction notice, according to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, sent from Six Nations Council Chief Bill Montour, who issued the eviction.

If this is government land and an illegal operation was occurring, what effect does an eviction notice from anyone other than the government of the day mean? I simply continue to ask and have not yet received any form of an answer aside from the information that even the minister did correct. His record was incorrect.

Has there been rent paid by the vendor on this property? Will the minister share the third-party eviction notice with us so we can see? He has obviously seen the eviction notice sent from the third party, or has the government transferred the title to that property without us knowing?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm going to have to quiet down all my colleagues who are outside of camera range right now. You can keep it down. No, no, no. That's enough.

The member made reference to the referral by the Premier. Just to get this on the record, Premier Dalton McGuinty has attended question period, thus far, more than any other Premier in the history of Ontario, and that not only includes his presence here in the Legislature but also the number of times that he has answered questions.

When I was sitting over there, I remember well the second term of the Conservative government. I remember that the Premier of the day, the Honourable Michael D. Harris, spent a considerable time quite noticeably on a golf course, and his question period attendance was about 20%. On the other hand, we have the most active and activist Premier certainly thus far in the history of Ontario, but he has really only just begun.

With respect to my response, again I appreciated the opportunity to correct my own record that in fact it was eviction notices sent by the chief and the band council for Six Nations. The extent to which there was jurisdiction for one versus the other two is really probably a legal question that would end up on a law exam, but what's important here is that there's a smoke shack just off Argyle Street on a highway right-of-way, which probably means it's the Ministry of Transportation as opposed to Public Infrastructure Renewal. On the other hand, it's managed by ORC, the Ontario Realty Corp.

But the point is, as I said in the opposition day motion, that I agree with CAMH and a number of other anti-smoking activists that there isn't anybody who would support or condone the level of contraband cigarettes that's taking place here today. Our point, and the point I was trying to make on the question, however imperfectly, was that this isn't really, by the official opposition, an attempt to suddenly find religion on anti-smoking, but rather it's an attempt ultimately to divide communities in circumstances that are already particularly divisive.

I'm getting another question, another late show, and I'll probably be able to elaborate when I answer the member's late show.

1810

NATIVE LAND DISPUTES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs on the issue of barricades and problems at Tyendinaga, Deseronto and Six Nations in Caledonia.

The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has five minutes.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I also am requesting a more thorough reply, a more direct answer, to some questions raised this afternoon. I was dissatisfied with the responses from the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

However, I did direct the first question to the Premier. I was just describing Sunday morning, when my wife and I were at Tyendinaga. It was a beautiful morning. It's a beautiful area, the Tyendinaga-Deseronto area. We were told that Highway 2 was open. I didn't realize we were on old Highway 2, County Road 2. We came upon a barricade. A fire was set on the highway. I chatted with the people there. I found it quite disconcerting. There were two young girls there; they had ice cream cones. It may have been a family. There were only four people manning the native side of the barricade that I was on.

I got directions, got turned around and went into Deseronto. Chatting with people about this situation—it obviously was the talk of Main Street. I was not sure who the MPP was. I spoke with the police as well. Everybody seemed to be out and about. I came away with the feeling that Deseronto is forgotten, that nobody seemed to know who was in charge. I wasn't sure who the MPP was for Deseronto. It is Minister Dombrowsky. I thought maybe it was Mr. Hillier. But I was asked about that, and I asked them as well.

I raised the question to the Premier, "Have you directed your minister to hide? Have you directed your cabinet colleagues to be unavailable" for comment? I read that in one of the eastern Ontario newspapers. "Have you directed your minister"—of course, this wasn't directed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs but to the Premier. "Have you asked the minister to refrain from standing up for the good people at both Tyendinaga and Deseronto?"

I'm not sure what went on here. It was difficult to understand the answers, even reading Hansard. I do know that the minister chose to rail on about a dead deer.

Further to that, I'm getting e-mails. I got an e-mail from a lady who lives in Prince Edward county. She

works in both Deseronto and Napanee; very upset with what she considers the destructive and disruptive protests. She does not feel safe. She actually has stopped purchasing items on, as she calls, "the reservation." I think that's really quite unfortunate.

These things occur when there is a lack of leadership and when people really don't know who's in charge and who should be running things and who should be talking to the mayor of Deseronto or the chief of Tyendinaga. Maybe we'll find out in this answer that I'm anticipating.

The supplementary question—I do want to address that as well, briefly—is the issue of an apparent double standard with respect to the illegal activity that I observed in eastern Ontario. There was obviously no burn permit. It was in contravention of the Highway Traffic Act.

In Deseronto, Chief Commissioner Fantino was clear. In an April 25 news release he indicated, "This violent criminal activity occurred outside of any legitimate protest and will not be tolerated." And it wasn't tolerated, because he arrested them.

I went back to Caledonia yet again; my third visit over the weekend. I rolled in there and was constantly getting feedback on what had occurred there and the fact that, to my knowledge, criminal activity had occurred not over a land claim but in support of Shawn Brant and the arrests that were made. To my knowledge, there were no arrests made in Caledonia. People were saying, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander. Why does this double standard exist? Why, with activity occurring, were people arrested in Deseronto, but in Caledonia, not because of a land claim but a protest, if you will, there were no arrests?"

Very simply, I'd like to get a more direct and fulsome answer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs again.

Hon. Michael Bryant: On the subject of arrests, I think the member knows that nobody in this House—no MPP, no member of government—is walking around with a holster and cuffs. I think the member knows that it is up to police officers to execute that duty. If I'm hearing the member correctly, what he's doing is playing armchair quarterback when it comes to the activities of the OPP and Chief Commissioner Fantino in particular. I just want to disagree with him. Not only is it not the role of the government to direct police officers, as has been outlined by the Ipperwash commission and as is known by all members of this House—or they ought to know; in fact, the OPP has really done a remarkable and excellent job.

I just want to quote from the chief commissioner, who put out a release quite recently. "The OPP officers involved showed the professionalism and dedication to duty that the OPP has built its reputation on for almost 100 years. I thank them for their work," says Chief Commissioner Fantino. I want to echo not just that sentiment but those words. The OPP officers are doing an excellent job under very tough circumstances.

You would have thought that the member who represents that community might have wanted to talk about the good work that the OPP did in achieving what turned out to be, in the words of Chief Commissioner Fantino, "a peaceful conclusion." The OPP announced that the Highway 6 bypass in Caledonia has reopened. Chief Commissioner Fantino said, "Ongoing dialogue between the OPP and Six Nations leadership, and among the Six Nations leaders themselves, as well as our own commitment to resolve these matters in the safest manner possible, produced this important result." It is an important result, and it's a credit to the OPP and the people seeking peaceful solutions that this was able to occur.

Chief Commissioner Fantino goes on to say, "I am grateful to everyone affected for their patience; and to aboriginal leaders and their community members for the critical role they played in the successful resolution of the incidents near Deseronto and in Caledonia." I again agree, and have said before and will say again that those leaders have showed tremendous leadership and patience.

I wonder if the person who represents the border of that community can say that he played a critical role in the successful resolution of the incidents when what he's doing in this Legislature is calling for arrests. I think it's pretty obvious that the member who's asking the question played no critical role in the successful resolution. He seemed to work very hard to avoid a successful resolution and did everything he could to fan the flames and create division in a particularly tense time.

As for the great Minister of Agriculture, the member for Prince Edward–Hastings—who was present throughout last weekend, by the way—she was very much front and centre, continuing to work with First Nations, the municipality and the community—unlike that member, who chooses whom he works with. Does he work with First Nations, Six Nations Haudenonsaunee and the community? No. The chief and council said to me, "He used to come by, but he doesn't seem to come by anymore, and he hasn't been on Six Nations in a very long time."

I don't think this particular matter, or anything having anything to do with First Nations, should be one where Canadians should have to choose sides, and I think it's quite wrong for the member to suggest that that should happen.

As for the deer that he made reference to, that I went on and on, I would not want any member of this House to have a picture of a deer with bullet holes in him with their name on it. I would never wish that on anybody—not a New Democrat, not a Conservative, not a Liberal; nobody. But, in fact, this was the event in the photos that was celebrated, lauded and promoted by the member for Lanark, whose approach to these issues of justice is, in his words, "If you break the law and you"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1821.

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Mercredi 30 avril 2008

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 30 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 30 avril 2008

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FIRE IN BOWMANVILLE

Mr. John O'Toole: Less than 24 hours after the announcement of the tragic layoffs at General Motors in the car and truck plant, my hometown of Bowmanville was hit by a fire that damaged four stores in the historic area of downtown. Thankfully, there were no injuries. However, the blaze left 15 people homeless. The businesses directly affected by the fires were Lange's Photo, the Second Chance shop, which is an extension of Bethesda House women's shelter, the Vienna Café, a new business of a young person, and Leisure Lady, a very popular women's shop.

Our thoughts are with all those who suffered any loss in terms of their home, business, employment and property at this difficult time, as was expressed by Mayor Jim Abernethy and council.

I would like to pay tribute to Fire Chief Gord Weir and the Clarington fire department. About 60 firefighters were on the scene in moments, assisted by colleagues from neighbouring Oshawa and the Ontario Power Generation plant at Darlington.

I'd like to thank the Salvation Army and the Red Cross for coming to the aid of those who are victims of the fire. Thanks also to the Durham regional police and emergency medical services.

The Bowmanville business improvement area, the BIA, has a popular event scheduled for this weekend. The Maplefest will go ahead as planned. Bowmanville is also this year celebrating its 150th anniversary of the founding of the town of Bowmanville. None of these will be obstacles for such a strong community.

Fire is just another piece of bad news for the local economy. However, I am confident that now more than ever the community will work together to support the historic downtown of my community. You can't keep a strong community down. I extend my sympathies.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: Why is it that all Ontario workers pay into employment insurance yet most of them cannot collect EI when they need it most? EI ought to be the first line of defence for workers when they lose their jobs, but the system is failing Ontario workers, as only 75% of them qualify for EI benefits. That's because the federal government's eligibility rules ignore the reality of the times and assume that jobs in this province are easy to get.

An Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers. The average Ontario worker, in fact, gets $4,000 less by way of employment insurance than Canadians living in other provinces.

We want the federal government to ensure that our unemployed workers qualify for the same types of benefits as unemployed workers in the rest of the country. If one does not qualify for EI, they're also ineligible for many job retraining programs.

The federal government's employment insurance surplus, on top of that, now stands at $54 billion.

In 2006, the average regular benefit paid per unemployed person in other provinces was $9,000; in Ontario, it was $5,000.

On behalf of Ontario workers, we must demand that the EI system be changed and reformed to stop the discrimination against Ontario workers. We need to end the discrimination and unfairness so that Ontario workers get their EI benefits when they need them most. I hope we can all stand together and ask the feds to reform the EI system for our workers.

PLANT CLOSURE

Mr. Tim Hudak: As you saw yesterday, I asked the Minister of Economic Development and Trade what offers the McGuinty government had put on the table to help save CanGro in Niagara, and sadly, there was no answer. Obviously, that meant that the province had put no offers on the table to save that plant. Niagara residents and Hamilton businesses—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I'd ask the member from Niagara to withdraw the comment that he made, please.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I apologize.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Now Niagara and Hamilton businesses have been given that picture of tender fruit trees being pulled out of the ground as we speak.

While the Minister of Economic Development and Trade was in China cutting a ribbon, they were handing

out the pink slips at CanGro to 100 workers, and now 150 tender fruit growers are without a market.

The McGuinty government gave $50 million to Magna while its CEO, Mr. Stronach, was making $40 million. The McGuinty government gave $14 million to Sanofi Pasteur, a French multinational that has $4 billion in international sales. Yet they couldn't find a single dime to save these jobs at CanGro in Niagara or support a bid by Niagara business people.

Dalton McGuinty locked this land into the greenbelt and then he walked away. He is an absentee landlord.

I ask the minister: Are you going to work to save this plant? And if you've already given up on CanGro in Niagara, then help the tender fruit farmers and displaced workers find new jobs and new markets for our tender fruit growers.

PLANT CLOSURE

Mr. Peter Kormos: At the end of the day, the real issue is that the peach and pear producers in Niagara wouldn't need to change their crops if this government had come to the table meaningfully in support of maintaining CanGro as the only fruit processing plant in Canada east of the Rocky Mountains. This government came to the table, but they didn't bring anything with them.

Minister Pupatello skedaddled off to China on the walking tour of the Great Wall while her bureaucrats sat silent and empty-handed at the so-called negotiating table, knowing full well that she was scuttling the deal by doing that.

There were two legitimate buyers of that operation: workers with a great deal of experience, and fruit producers who need a fruit processing plant. It is the last chance that this government has to save a made-in-Ontario, value-added fruit processing plant.

For this government to somehow explain or complain that there was nothing they could do is beyond naive.

This government wants a greenbelt? A greenbelt ain't worth the paper it's written on if you don't have farmers earning enough working their property, producing peaches and pears to sustain that property as agricultural land.

This government talks about jobs? It just turned its back on over 120 hard-working women and men down in Niagara at CanGro.

This government wants to see made-in-Ontario agricultural produce? Hell's bells, what we're going to be stuck with is imports from China. Maybe that's what the minister was doing over there—arranging for those imports—because there ain't going to be no fruit produce coming out of Niagara.

1340

YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES STRATEGY

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I rise in the House today to speak about how the McGuinty government is helping Toronto youth from high-needs neighbourhoods gain valuable work experience. Some of the youth in these neighbourhoods may not always have the same opportunities as other teenagers. These opportunities are crucial when young people are attempting to gain confidence and skills for the workplace.

This summer, the McGuinty government is investing $5.3 million to help approximately 850 youths from high-needs Toronto neighbourhoods through Ontario's youth opportunities strategy. This investment will help youth in Scarborough–Rouge River with summer job programs, youth outreach workers and school-based programs to help youth in conflict with the law.

One hundred of the job opportunities will be with the Toronto Police Service in the areas of forensic and traffic safety units. I am quite confident that the young people involved in Ontario's youth opportunities strategy will enjoy success this summer, simply based on the great results that came out of the strategy in Scarborough–Rouge River over the last three summers. In fact, almost 1,800 summer jobs were created in cities across Ontario as a result of this strategy. This strategy provides a chance for our youth to make a positive contribution to their communities and a chance to explore opportunities for their future so that they can be successful.

LISTOWEL ECONOMY

Mr. John Yakabuski: While the Minister of Research and Innovation opts for a photo op at the Economic Club, things are not going well in Listowel, a small town of only 6,500 in his riding, where about 500 people who have spent their lives producing products for the Campbell's Soup Company will soon find themselves on the proverbial soup line. Five hundred people are losing their jobs and their livelihood, but the truth of the matter is that we're talking about financial devastation for at least twice that number.

The statistic does not speak to the fact that most of those laid-off employees have families who will be seriously affected; to the chicken farmers who have one less place to sell their product; and to all other businesses in Listowel, because up until now, they've been doing business with those 500 families.

The residents of Listowel—indeed throughout Ontario, where we've recently seen losses of more than 190,000 manufacturing jobs—are asking themselves if the Premier has any advice other than what he recently offered to Hamilton residents, saying, "Steel yourself; this too shall pass." This is cold comfort to those who are undoubtedly experiencing one of the darker days of their lives.

I have asked the Premier to face up to the fact that our economy is deteriorating under his leadership, and that he needs to take action to protect other towns in rural Ontario from Listowel's fate. This was a factory that for 48 years made food to nourish Canadian families.

The Premier's policies are hitting us all below the belt. His suggestion that we tighten it simply won't help.

Campbell's might want to reconsider the viability of producing soup in Ontario, because the way this government is leading us, there will soon be thousands more on that soup line.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: There are some great high schools in my community of Oakville. We're joined today by the students from McLaughlin College; they're in the west public gallery.

I'm rising today because I recently attended one of the student breakfasts at another great high school, St. Thomas Aquinas, in my riding, put on by a group called Halton Food for Thought. I was completely impressed with the nutritious foods and substantial information that this organization is providing students. Research studies support the existing link between nutrition and a student's ability to learn. The Halton Food for Thought program promotes a connection between healthy food choices and improved learning. Student accessibility is a top priority for the organization. Regardless of income level, all students participate in the programs. The program highlights the importance of healthy food choices and always includes a fresh fruit or a vegetable.

I'd like to recognize all the individuals and businesses who make this program a reality: Catherine Wright, the program coordinator, and Pat Daly, the principal at St. Thomas Aquinas. I also applaud all the businesses that help sponsor the program and note the role played by the region of Halton, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The recent 2008 budget provided an additional $32 million over three years to double funding for the student nutrition program in Ontario. We're really making a difference, and I thank all those involved.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to rise today during Education Week to highlight some of the amazing progress that has been made in my riding of Mississauga–Brampton South. Thanks to our government's investments in public education, investments made by this government have led to a dramatic reduction in class sizes across Ontario, and schools in my riding have benefited greatly.

Shortly after this government took office, only 11% of primary classes in the Peel District School Board were operating with 20 or fewer students. Today, 91% of Peel primary classes have 20 or fewer students.

As a former educator, I can tell you that a smaller class increases a teacher's ability to meet the needs of individual students in their classroom. This allows each student to reach their full potential. I am proud to be a part of a government that has reduced class sizes and has helped our students reach higher levels of achievement across Ontario.

JACK GORDON

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: We have a very important employee to recognize today: Sergeant Jack Gordon has worked with the Legislature of Ontario since 1974.

Applause.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Sergeant Jack has spent the past 34 years in ensuring the safety of government employees and the citizens of Ontario. Jack began his journey as a special constable with the Ontario Government Protective Service. He advanced to the rank of sergeant and served in both operational and administrative portfolios before leaving to join the security services at Queen's Park in 1997.

Over the years, Jack has touched the lives of hundreds of officers, many of whom serve to this day on police services across our great province. Jack has forged a legacy of professionalism and dedication that makes us all proud to be his friend and colleague. Jack has been a moral compass for the men and women of the law enforcement services for which he has served. His commitment to the values that guide him remain intact after 34 years. Jack's philosophy of treating those around him as he would like to be treated has served him well.

Best of luck, and enjoy your retirement, Jack. You will not be forgotten. Bonne retraite, Jack. Merci.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Katch Koch): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill Pr5, An Act respecting Madresa Ashraful Uloom.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments, dated April 30, 2008, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE

Ms. Best moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 69, An Act to protect children from second-hand tobacco smoke in motor vehicles by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act / Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée pour protéger les enfants contre le tabagisme passif dans les véhicules automobiles.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement.

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I will make a statement during ministerial statements.

1350

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO STRATEGY

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I am pleased to be here today to tell you about the government's proposed Smoke-Free Ontario Amendment Act, 2008. The primary objective of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act has always been to protect people from second-hand smoke, both in enclosed public places and enclosed workplaces. This amendment would extend province-wide protection to children in motor vehicles.

An important part of our government's efforts to promote health and prevent illness is the smoke-free Ontario strategy. Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario: It kills 13,000 people every year in our province. Thanks to the hard work of this government and our partners, Ontario is recognized as having one of the most comprehensive smoke-free strategies in North America.

Legislation is an integral part of this strategy. Equally important are our investments in programs and public education to prevent children and youth from starting to smoke and to help smokers quit. In our government's last mandate, we had a commitment to reduce tobacco consumption by 20%. I am happy to say that we have surpassed that target. The proposed amendment that I am bringing forward today builds on our commitment to a healthier, smoke-free Ontario.

Children are especially vulnerable to second-hand smoke because they have higher respiration rates than adults. In addition, their respiratory, immune and nervous systems are still developing. A study by the Ontario Medical Association found that children exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to suffer health problems such as sudden infant death syndrome, asthma, cancer and cardiac diseases later in life. Exposure to second-hand smoke among children has also been linked to lower cognitive test scores compared with children who were not exposed.

There is growing evidence that second-hand smoke in vehicles is particularly harmful. Recent studies suggest that the concentration of toxins in vehicles can be up to 27 times worse than in a smoker's home. A 2005 Health Canada study estimated that in a one-month period, 144,000 children in Ontario were exposed to second-hand smoke in vehicles.

Over the past year, health stakeholders have increasingly called on the government to act. In fact, several of those partners are in the east members' gallery today. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and welcome them: Rocco Rossi from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario; George Habib and Joanne Di Nardo from the Ontario Lung Association; Michael Perley, Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco; Carol Timmings, Ontario Public Health Association; Irene Gallagher and Rowena Pinto, Canadian Cancer Society; and Gail Beatty from the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

On December 6, 2007, David Orazietti, MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, introduced Bill 11 with solid backing from the OMA, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the lung association. Thank you once again, Mr. Orazietti, for bring this issue to the attention of the public and myself.

Ontarians are strongly supportive of a ban: 80% of Ontarians, including the majority of smokers, have said they support this type of legislation. The medical science is clear: Second-hand smoke is dangerous to our children's health. As with seat belt legislation, we owe it to our children to keep them safe and healthy. Based on our experience of high compliance with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and the support of Ontarians, we anticipate a high level of voluntary compliance.

In closing, I want to acknowledge all of our stakeholders for their ongoing commitment to this very important cause. The people of Ontario have spoken, and we have listened. Now we are taking action. Ontarians are ready for legislation to protect our children from being exposed to second-hand smoke in motor vehicles. This is about the safety and well-being of our children, our future. It is about making families healthier. It is about a smoke-free Ontario. I hope you agree.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

SUBVENTIONS POUR LES ARTS ET LA CULTURE

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Speaking about the success of Ontario's creative industries and building on that

success is a key priority for the McGuinty government. As the Minister of Culture, I am proud to champion Ontario's talented arts and culture community.

Our artists create vibrant communities. They help us exchange ideas, images, stories and experiences that reflect our province and who we are as a people.

Nos artistes créent des communautés dynamiques. Ils nous aident à échanger des idées, des images, des histoires et des expériences qui sont le reflet de la province et de sa population.

That's why I was pleased to announce yesterday in Kingston that the McGuinty government is investing an additional $20 million over four years in the Ontario Arts Council. In our government's recent budget, we announced that we are increasing the Ontario Arts Council's total annual funding to almost $60 million by the year 2009-10. This builds on already substantial funding increases in the past four years. By next year, funding from the McGuinty government to the OAC will have increased by 140%. Indeed, our government is committed to helping Ontario's arts and culture community succeed by investing in the OAC. Last year, the OAC funded almost 900 arts organizations, and this funding reached over 1,200 artists in over 200 communities across Ontario.

Arts and culture are more than just a cultural benefit to our province; they are also a major economic driver in communities across our province. Ontario's cultural industries generate nearly $20 billion to the provincial economy, and in the last eight years, Ontario's entertainment and creative industries created over 80,000 new jobs in our province.

In this context, it is clear that arts and culture are a vital part of the new, innovative economy, so investing in arts and culture is part of our government's five-point plan to strengthen the economy and enhance Ontario's competitiveness. Through key investments in growth sectors such as the entertainment and creative industries, the government is bolstering our economy and enhancing the quality of life of all Ontarians.

I am pleased to tell you that in the past 10 years, employment in the entertainment and creative cluster has grown at twice the rate of the overall Ontario economy. In fact, Ontario's cultural industries are the third largest in North America by employment, after California and New York. Culture is also a major driver of tourism, generating more than $4.5 billion annually across Ontario.

The McGuinty government is taking bold steps to ensure that this sector continues to thrive, and in our government's recent budget, funding to the Ministry of Culture has been increased by $63 million over the next four years.

1400

Le gouvernement McGuinty prend des mesures audacieuses pour veiller à ce que ce secteur continue d'être florissant. Le récent budget du gouvernement prévoit une augmentation de financement du ministère de la Culture de 63 $ millions au cours des quatre prochaines années.

This increased funding allows our government to support organizations that improve the quality of life for Ontarians both culturally and economically. By investing in Ontario's arts and cultural industries, we are creating more opportunities for our talented artists to flourish and succeed at home and around the world.

MUNICIPALITIES

LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Hon. Jim Watson: Later this week, representatives from Ontario's small urban municipalities will gather in Collingwood. I look forward to joining these representatives, along with my colleagues David Caplan, Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, and George Smitherman, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, at the provincial ministers' forum. During their annual conference, they will be conducting sessions on each of the four pillars of sustainability.

The interconnection of environmental responsibility, economic viability, social equity and cultural vitality is key in the building of sustainable communities.

Sustainability has been embraced as a core long-term planning principle by both the province of Ontario and Ontario's municipalities. Since taking office, our government has taken a number of steps to support sustainable development. We've created the greenbelt, we have produced a new building code with higher energy efficiency requirements, and we've helped develop the growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe. Nous avons apporté des réformes à la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire et à la Commission des affaires municipales de l'Ontario, et nous avons publié une nouvelle Déclaration de principes provinciale.

We're now implementing $1.4 billion in new funding to build strategic infrastructure. This includes the $450-million municipal infrastructure investment initiative, or MIII, a program designed to help communities restore and revitalize public infrastructure.

This strategic infrastructure funding is at work for several OSUM members. Penetanguishene, for instance, is receiving $1.5 million for reconstruction of Church Street. Cobourg is getting $537,000 in funding for the restoration of its Midtown Creek sanitary diversion project. Brighton is getting $1 million for an arena expansion and community centre project.

The infrastructure funding has been appreciated by municipal leaders across the province. For example, Hanover Mayor Kathi Maskell told her local paper on April 4, "The province obviously recognizes the value of investing in our community and that's great news for us."

Sustainability has been embraced as a core long-term planning principle by the province and by municipalities of all sizes, urban and rural, north, south, east and west.

Everyone is learning how best to balance environmental, social, cultural, and economic imperatives. Many municipalities are currently dealing with how to best implement new authority given to them through amend-

ments to the Municipal Act and under recent Planning Act reforms.

Pour la première fois, elles peuvent songer à exiger si l'extérieur des nouveaux bâtiments devrait intégrer des éléments de conception comme les toits verts ou les panneaux solaires.

Municipal councils, when approving new subdivisions, may take into account how plans maximize energy efficiency and require that they incorporate public transit routes.

The concept of sustainability has become an important principle in long-term community planning. Planning for sustainability is now regarded as good business practice. Good land use planning is not only about economic factors. Social, environmental and cultural considerations must also be taken into account. Our challenge is to find the best means to improve the health and social well-being of our communities while preserving, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and contributing to a strong economy.

I look forward, with my colleagues, to taking part in this very important conference in Collingwood. Through our strong partnership with Ontario municipalities, we are working to achieve that goal of sustainability at the municipal-provincial level.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO STRATEGY

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the official opposition on the bill brought forward today by the Minister of Health Promotion.

The opposition members on this side of the House certainly believe very strongly in the protection and safety of our vulnerable members of society, especially with respect to children. It would be challenging for anyone in this House to find something that trumps the importance and safety of children.

There is a bit of history to the bill we see before us today. Over a year ago, the Premier himself denounced what the Minister of Health Promotion has introduced today. He used carefully crafted language, something like "a slippery slope."

Let me quote the head of the Ontario Medical Association from January 23 this year:

"I ... hope it's at the top of their docket.

"Sooner is better for the health of the children that are involved."

What's concerning is that the same article says that the "Minister of Health Promotion ... said she's content to ... debate a ban at the end of the year." So I certainly hope that the minister is sincere in what she says about moving forward with this legislation.

The Ontario Medical Association, the lung association and various other groups, whom I thank for being here today, have been calling for this type of legislation for over three years now in provinces such as British Columbia and Nova Scotia, which have already taken action. So neither the minister nor the Premier should be taking credit for this. They're leading from behind the pack on this issue, for sure.

We all want to protect our children; there's no question. It shouldn't matter where they are in Ontario, and certainly this minister wants to be perceived as doing the right thing. So I ask the question, why did you allow your Liberal colleagues to vote against the protection of children in Caledonia from smoking illegal, illicit cigarettes yesterday evening? You know the sale of these illegal cigarettes is being facilitated by the Liberal government on crown land metres from schools, but they were silent on this.

Where was the Minister of Health Promotion when my colleague and health critic brought forward a resolution calling for the Premier to initiate an educational campaign for parents?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock, please. I'd just remind the Minister of Finance that saying a word that is unparliamentary or offering an action that is unparliamentary is not acceptable. Thank you.

Member, please continue.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you very much for that, Mr. Speaker.

When my colleague brought forward a bill calling for an educational campaign for parents and others on the dangers of smoking in vehicles with children inside, this government was silent yet again. When asked why children can purchase cheap and dangerous cigarettes without so much as being asked for identification, she is silent. Why should some children in this province be excluded from protection from smoking, both first- and second-hand ways? It's two-tier protection of children.

Is the minister going to plan to police the automobiles as they drive away from the many illegal smoke shops we have in Ontario? Is she going to enforce that? The member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills brought forward amendments that would protect children who have been physically or sexually abused by parents. The Liberal members voted this down too. My colleague from Burlington brought forward legislation that would amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. The Liberal government killed that again. Again, the minister was silent.

I look forward to debating the merits of this bill if it's the government's will that it actually move forward this time.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to add a couple of comments with regard to the announcement made by the Minister of Culture today. First of all, obviously we are glad to see funding announced for the Ontario Arts Council. I think all of us recognized, certainly when we were in government, the importance of investing in the arts. It's interesting to note the kind of employment this has created and the fact that the creative cluster has grown at twice the rate.

I wish this minister would also have the same enthusiasm with the heritage side of her ministry as we look at the spectre of the wrecking ball on Alma College in St. Thomas. There is concern within the community that this minister is not using the power she has to save this building. I think that the people of Ontario would appreciate her leadership on this part of her portfolio.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. John O'Toole: The Minister of Municipal Affairs talked about sustainability. I just want to remind him that sustainability starts with a strong economy. Think of the people in Trenton and United Food. Think of the people in Listowel, with Campbell Soup closing. Think of the people in Niagara and Exeter, with CanGro closing. Think of the people in Chesterville, with the Nestlé plant closing. Think of the people in northern Ontario, those small communities engaged in the forestry industry. Think about the economy and the sustainability of our very province of Ontario and the little job plan that you have.

Minister, you should be ashamed to be standing up and having this conference with Ontario's small-town communities. All you've done is download to the municipalities.

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MUNICIPALITIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Minister of Municipal Affairs, New Democrats have great respect for the women and men who head Ontario's small urban centres. The challenge of running municipalities increases greatly, however, when governments only talk about supporting small urban centres and don't deliver. We saw this with Mike Harris, and we see it with Dalton McGuinty as well.

Downloading, development charges, sustainability and the environment make for precarious situations for municipalities, small and large. They have to pay their own bills and they have to pay the McGuinty government's bill as well. In fact, the Development Charges Act works against municipalities and their ability to ensure orderly, well-supported, sustainable development.

We've joined other municipalities in asking for the McGuinty government to reform the Development Charges Act here in Ontario. New roads, sewer and water and other services have to be paid for by developers, not municipal taxpayers, in real time and real dollars. The McGuinty government has done nothing to end the free ride land developers received under Mike Harris. Reforming development charges and protecting property taxpayers from subsidizing developers is long overdue in this province and needs to be dealt with. New Democrats have raised these issues in the past and will continue to call on the McGuinty government to make sure that this government stops subsidizing developers in the province of Ontario. Growth must pay its own way or else municipalities' ability to invest in infrastructure continues to be undermined, along with Ontario's competitive position.

Despite so much fanfare—speaking of infrastructure—around Bill 35 helping the municipalities with the infrastructure deficit, the Liberals have nothing to crow about on this file. Bill 35 is not going to result in a dime of infrastructure investment in municipalities, and everybody knows it. In fact, the legislation doesn't even talk about municipal services at all. It's a scam and it's a sham.

We see waste management and environmental stewardship are on the agenda for this conference; that's good to know. Wouldn't it be great if we had a government that actually helped municipalities achieve more than 30% waste diversion in their waste streams? Wouldn't that be an important thing, an actual provincial strategy that helped them to make it happen? I say to this government: Talk is cheap. Let's see some real action.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: In response to the Minister of Culture and arts, we certainly support the funding for the Ontario Arts Council. Council support for independent artists across the province is invaluable. We know how vital arts funding is to energizing communities and building their economies. While the $5-million increment will help the arts community, we need to keep in mind the outstanding need. In their most recent submission to the province, the Ontario Arts Council requested $35 million in additional provincial support. By 2009-10, Ontario will have provided about 60% of the amount requested. So we still have a long way to go.

We need serious long-term arts funding. If we want to make sure the arts are here for the long run, they need to have predictable funding. While I speak about this minister's portfolio, I also urge her to look at the need to preserve Alma College in St. Thomas.

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO STRATEGY

M^me^ France Gélinas: I will be talking about the smoke-free Ontario strategy. As the NDP, we certainly support legislation that will decrease the exposure to second-hand smoke and programs that help people quit smoking. But I have serious worries. If we are serious in wanting to protect our children, then we have to be serious about health promotion. We need a comprehensive, integrated, sustainable approach that includes community-based programming, such as the motion from the Sudbury and District Health Unit sent to this government, which clearly states: "Health promotion best practices tell us that punitive strategies alone do not work. The proper order for health promotion strategy is, first of all, you target health promotion education and you follow it by legislation."

I hope to see funding coming through for Best Start programs in health units so that every single parent of a newborn child in Ontario gets education about smoking

in cars. We also want to see funding for Early Years programs, so that those parents also get educated as to the drastic effect of smoking in cars. We want community health centres to receive funding so they, too, can work with their target population. Above all, we want to see resources going to aboriginal health access centres so that the aboriginal population also gets the education they need to prevent second-hand smoke from going to aboriginal children.

Although we agree that the rate of tobacco consumption has gone down, it has not gone down for the First Nations, which is three times higher. It's a good goal, but not so good a strategy.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There are a number of guests we'd like to welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Burlington: from Newmarket–Aurora, students and their teachers from Sacred Heart Catholic High School.

In the west public gallery, on behalf of page Vanessa Chiarello, we'd like to welcome her mother, Vincenza Chiarello, here to the chamber today.

On behalf of the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, in the west members' gallery: Ms. Cecilia Smith, Mark Smith and Luke Smith. They're here to visit their son and brother, page Peter Smith, who's also one of our page captains today.

On behalf of the member from York South–Weston, we'd like to welcome the students and teachers from St. Fidelis School who are visiting Queen's Park.

On behalf of the member from Hamilton Mountain, in the west members' gallery: Carol Wiggins and Vic Vinerskis. Welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Nickel Belt, in the accessible gallery: Sonia, Tony and Alessia Commisso, and Seema Sidawi, a family friend.

On behalf of the member from Oakville: the McLaughlin College students from grade 10 in the west public gallery.

In the east public gallery, a former colleague and good friend of ours: Gary Malkowski, member from York East in the 35th Parliament. Welcome to Gary and his friends today.

I'd also like to acknowledge, in the Speaker's gallery, some guests of mine today: First, the Honourable Thandi Modise, the Speaker from the North West Provincial Legislature of South Africa, a very interesting lady whose political career began with fighting apartheid. She spent 10 years in jail and was elected in the first democratic elections in 1994—one of the first members elected.

With the Honourable Speaker are the honourable Nogolide Nojozi, South African consul general, and her husband, Anthony Mokhele; as well, Seth MomPei, political officer of the consul general, and Sarah Ledwaba, protocol officer.

Joining them today is the Honourable Jean Augustine, the Fairness Commissioner for the province. Welcome.

Applause.

JACK GORDON

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There was a statement read earlier this afternoon recognizing Jack Gordon. Jack is seated in the Speaker's gallery. But now that all members are present in the chamber, I can make this comment: I just want to say thank you on behalf of all of us for your 35 years of commitment and service to this Legislature, not only looking out for the interests of us as members but looking out for the interests of the staff, as well as looking out for the thousands of visitors who visit this building every day. Jack, we want to thank you for your fine, dedicated service since 1974.

There's a reception this afternoon, and I encourage members to join in the celebration of Jack's retirement. Jack, we wish you all the best and we just want to say thank you for everything you've done for all of us.

Applause.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm sad that Jack's leaving because he finally realized I'm old enough to be here this year.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That is not a point of order.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question to the Premier is about Ontario's impending and reputation-damaging attainment, if you will, of have-not status. In 2003, Ontario led this country in economic growth. Today, we're virtually dead last. Up until 2003, Ontario led in private sector job growth. Today, Ontario is last. In 2003, Ontario's economy was healthy, robust and secure. In almost five years, Premier, you have put Ontario on the brink of have-not status. You are going to be looked at in history as the welfare Premier of Ontario. That's going to be your legacy. I asked you yesterday and received no response. I ask you again: Is this a legacy you will be proud of?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to a very important issue. There are a couple of things in mind that I ask Ontarians to consider.

We have two separate issues. The first one is the rate of our economic growth. It's being challenged. The leader of the official opposition knows well that when it comes to the price of oil, the high loonie and a sluggish US economy, those are real constraints on our economic growth here. That was well spoken to in the Toronto Dominion Bank's report released just yesterday. That's one issue, and I welcome the opportunity to debate that.

There's a second one, and that is: What are we doing with the wealth we are generating here in the province of Ontario? Every single year now, for some time, we've been sending about $20-plus billion to the rest of the country. It's one thing for us to do that in the best of times, but in challenging times, I think that's a real issue. I think it's time for us to debate that. It's time for us to decide who's on whose side when it comes to that particular issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to remind the members—because in the question that was asked, it may have been close. I just want to remind the members, from the House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Marleau and Montpetit, page 522:

"Remarks directed specifically at another member that question that member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order. A member will be requested to withdraw offensive remarks, allegations, or accusations of impropriety directed towards another member. The Speaker has no authority, however, to rule on statements made outside the House by one member against another."

Again, I just want to remind everyone that it's one thing to be critical of the government or the opposition, but to direct anything directly at a member is not proper.

Start the clock, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I appreciate your concern, Speaker, but I don't think that what I said in terms of that question falls within that category at all.

We agree that there are external causes for some of the challenges that the province is facing, but the Premier continuously takes no responsibility whatsoever for the state of the economy. The Premier yesterday was blaming the new equalization formula to explain why Ontario is on welfare, but on March 22, 2007, after the new formula was announced in the federal budget, the Ottawa Citizen reported: "'Ontario has scored three significant victories when it comes to our fight for fairness,' Mr. McGuinty crowed to reporters." Your then-finance minister was equally thrilled.

Premier, you keep twisting in the wind, trying to find someone or something else to blame, but the buck stops with you. Will you accept responsibility for putting Ontario on the dole?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that the leader of the official opposition knows better. The way that our fiscal arrangements have been established means that somehow we could end up being a recipient province, notwithstanding the fact that we're sending $20 billion to the rest of the country. If we were found technically to be in need, we would supply the money. There's something patently absurd and Kafkaesque about this.

There are going to be a lot of numbers floated around the country over the next few days, I am sure. But there's one that I'll ask Ontarians to keep in mind. Every year now, for some time, we have sent $20 billion to the rest of the country. I think that's unfair. I think Ontarians want to know where the opposition party stands on this issue. I think we should be keeping more of that money so we can invest in our economy and support Ontarians as we struggle together in this challenging economic time. Ontarians want to know: Whose side are they on?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Spending money like drunken sailors, slushgate, high taxes, increased regulation—the Premier takes no responsibility. If we are going to be the recipients of this money, is the Premier saying that we're going to turn it down? Is that what he's saying?

The Premier keeps trying to spin Ontarians on this crisis in the hopes that they won't be able to pin the tail on the donkey. But ask the thousands of people who've lost manufacturing and auto sector jobs; the small-business owner who's facing bankruptcy; the young people who hold a one-way ticket to Alberta. They know where the bull's eye is, Premier; it's in your office. Again, when will you start to accept some degree of responsibility?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's worthwhile taking a brief look back at their legacy. They had oil at $30 a barrel, they had the dollar at 60 cents, they had a US economy that was firing on all eight cylinders. Their legacy was a $5.5-billion deficit, cuts to our schools, cuts to our health care, cuts to valuable supports for our most vulnerable. That's their legacy.

We have balanced our budget every year, we've made record levels of investment in our health care and education, we're working together with our business partners and we're cutting business taxes.

There's another important issue that's brought to bear at this time. We're sending $20 billion to the rest of the country. We can't afford to do that, and Ontarians want to know who's going to stand up for them in their hour of need. What about their side?

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Now we know why it is Ontario's time of need, because your tax-and-spend economic policies have laid this once-mighty province low. It's the last in growth in all of Canada: dead last in job creation; some 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have left Ontario because of your tax-and-spend policies.

Premier, tell us it's not the case. Tell us that TD Economics is wrong. Is it Premier McGuinty's intention to put Ontario on the dole? Are we or are we not about to become a have-not province under your leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What TD Economics said, if the member would read it, is that the price of oil is affecting our status. The value of our dollar is affecting our status. The state of the US economy is affecting our status.

The truth of the matter is, Ontario continues to contribute $20 billion to the federation. It is expensive now, and Ontarians need a government that will stand up for Ontario's interests. That's what this Premier and this government are doing. Will you stand up for Ontario and defend the interests of our citizens starting here and starting now and going into the future?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Those 200,000 people who have lost their jobs and the 150 individuals at Plastech in Leamington are going to get pretty sick and tired of this Abbott and Costello routine we see across the floor. I wish the Premier had stood up to answer my questions. He delivered three lines and he sat down and passed on the question about Ontario becoming a have-not province.

We have always been the lead, the economic engine of Canada, number one in the country. Dalton McGuinty has laid this province low and he won't even answer questions about it.

I ask the finance minister then: What do you say to the families in Leamington who found out that the 150 jobs at Plastech are gone because of Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend policies? They think we're in a have-not status. Are they right?

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Hon. Dwight Duncan: Actually, we've talked to those families, and what they would like is equal access to employment insurance benefits, number one. What they want is a federal government that treats Ontario the way it treats other provinces. They know that tax cuts alone are not going to bring back their jobs.

What they need is a federal government that will work with Ontario, in partnership, to build a stronger federation by building a stronger Ontario. We need a federal government that will help make the investments in jobs that this government's made: the new Toyota plant, $7 billion in automotive sector investment. Our plan is the right plan. What we need is a federal partner that will make sure those unemployed workers have equal and fair access to employment insurance benefits. Will you call on them to do that?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I say back to the finance minister, you have got to be kidding me. They're asking for employment insurance access? They want their damn jobs, in Leamington and across the province of Ontario, the 200,000 that you have chased out of this province.

Let's put this in perspective. In 2002, Ontario's GDP per capita was $2,000 above the national average. Now, under Dalton McGuinty, for the first time ever, Ontario is below the national average when it comes to per capita GDP. You chased out 200,000 jobs, and under Dalton McGuinty, welfare rolls are up some 11% since you came into office. I ask the minister, why are you bound and determined to similarly put Ontario on the welfare roles of Confederation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, 540,000 net new jobs in four years, in spite of $117 oil; in the last year, 101,000 net new jobs, in spite of a dollar at par.

There are challenges in our economy today. One of the challenges is that Ontario is spending $20 billion a year, each and every year. TD has pointed out that that represents a 4.4% drag on Ontario's GDP, each and every year.

Our plan for Ontario's economy is the right plan. What we need is a federal partner that will respond and work with us to meet the challenges of the world price of oil, of a dollar at par and of the state of the US economy. That's what we need. And we need an opposition that will support us in protecting Ontario in these challenging times.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Yesterday, TD Economics said that Ontario is about to become a have-not province, and the loss of more than 200,000 good manufacturing jobs is a large part of Ontario's economic decline. Can the Premier explain why the economies of manufacturing provinces like Manitoba and Quebec are doing much better than the McGuinty government in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question, but on the basis of some of the questions put by some of my colleagues opposite, I'm not convinced that they have in fact read the report. There is a lot of great information found in this report. One of the things it says is, "Ontario's projected move into equalization-recipient—at least temporarily—would suggest to many Canadians that the province is no longer a net contributor to federal coffers. However, this is not the case." In 2005, "Ontario residents contributed a hefty $21 billion more to federal coffers than what was returned to the province in federal spending." It goes on to say, "In actualality then, Ontario residents will, in effect, be paying the equalization tab with their own money." So if there was anybody to be rescued, we would rescue ourselves.

We can talk about the best way to grow this economy, but there's a second issue, which is brought to the floor once again by the TD report, and that is whether or not it's appropriate for us, especially at this point in our history, to send $20 billion to the rest of the country. I think it's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, I didn't hear an answer to the question. I think what I heard is that, yes, the federal government has a tax rate and the federal government applies that tax rate in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Ontario, and they collect taxes in Ontario. Is the Premier suggesting that the federal government stop collecting taxes in Ontario? If he wants to make that case, good luck. Go out and make it.

But the issue here is this—and the TD Economics report makes it clear: A big part of Ontario's decline is the loss of manufacturing jobs in this province—in Windsor, Chatham, Sarnia, London, St. Thomas, Hamilton, Kitchener, Oshawa, and the list goes on. Manitoba and Quebec have taken action to sustain jobs in the manufacturing sector. Why is the McGuinty government missing in action on that front?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The loss of a job in a family is a terrible event. It's something that we are working to address. When it comes to the employment insurance regime, for example, we are asking the federal government to treat Ontarians fairly. Our workers are coming up

$4,000 less in terms of their employment insurance benefits in comparison to workers in other parts of the country—$4,000 would be used for groceries and rent and mortgage payments and basic necessities. It's not the kind of thing that people would sock away as part of a savings plan. That's just one example of an unfairness that continues to obtain when it comes to our relationship with the federal government.

It's one thing for us to send $20 billion to the feds in good times, but these are challenging times. I think, again, what Ontarians want to know is, can we close ranks, can we come together and say to the feds, "It's unfair"?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm amazed at the lengths that this Premier will go to to find someone else to blame. I don't remember Dalton McGuinty saying anything when Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien took the axe to the unemployment insurance system in 1994 and 1995. I don't remember your saying anything, but, suddenly, now, as we lose manufacturing jobs in Ontario, the Premier will bend over backwards to find someone to blame.

Premier, here's what Manitoba and Quebec have done: They've introduced a reasonable industrial hydro rate to sustain jobs; they have buy-domestic policies to sustain manufacturing jobs; and they've introduced a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit to sustain jobs.

Why won't the McGuinty government do some of those things, rather than looking around for someone else to blame?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I was wondering when he was going to come back to the manufacturing tax credit, but he finally did in the third question.

We could entertain those kinds of questions and those kinds of propositions. By and large, the Conservatives would have us cut taxes, and by and large, the NDP would have us spend more. There is probably some element of merit in each of the proposals, distilled to their essence.

There's probably some element of merit there, but we can't engage in that kind of a discussion in any kind of an intelligent way, because we send $20 billion to the federal government on an annual basis for them to distribute to the rest of the country. They're doing those kinds of things in Manitoba, they're doing those kinds of things in Quebec, and they're doing them with Ontario money: $20 billion is going to the rest of the country. Every once in awhile we have an opportunity to close ranks, to come together, and say: "That is unfair."

On behalf of Ontarians, what our government is saying is, sending 20 billion bucks elsewhere is unfair.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question, the leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I guess the Premier's response is that the federal government should stop collecting taxes in Ontario.

HOME CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question to the Premier is this: Here today in the Speaker's gallery is the Commisso family. Five-year-old Alessia is fighting an extremely rare illness called Leigh's disease, which affects her heart, lungs, liver and muscles, resulting in her loss of mobility.

Premier, could you tell me this: In January, why did the McGuinty government slash Alessia's home care from 54 hours a week to 15 hours a week?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health

Hon. George Smitherman: I think the member knows that the Minister of Health is in a position legally where speaking about a specific case is not appropriate.

I can tell the honourable member that with respect to home care, we've increased funding for home care by 47%—$575 million in additional funding—that supports almost 100,000 additional Ontarians each and every year.

Of course, when there are adjustments in the care because of altering circumstances with respect to the patient, this is part and parcel of the ongoing relationship, and case managers are involved. If people wish to appeal, there is a mechanism. I'd be happy to tell the honourable member about that further.

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Mr. Howard Hampton: This is also about all kinds of other people across Ontario who are having their home care hours cut. In Alessia's case, her mother, Sonia, is her primary caregiver. A few years ago, her father, Antonio, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which has since worsened such that he has also lost his mobility. This means that Alessia's mother provides basically all of her care. The home care that was cut was home care that allowed Alessia's mother to get a few hours' sleep at night, a few hours when she could rest because the rest of the day she was caring for her daughter. Again, I say to the Premier and to the Minister of Health: Can you explain to this family, who desperately need this home care, why it was cut, and cut radically, under the McGuinty government?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, in the individual circumstances, I do mention to the member again that the work of a case manager is to make these evaluations. From time to time, there are alterations in care which relate perhaps to alterations in clinical circumstances. I am not a clinician and I'm not on the front lines making those assessments.

The Health Services Appeal and Review Board stands as a mechanism and does allow anyone who feels that they have been inappropriately or unjustly circumstanced to bring those forward, and an independent organization has the capacity to order alteration.

But on the assertion that the honourable member makes about home care services overall, he's off the mark. Tens of thousands of additional Ontarians—just under 100,000—have had access to home care. Last year alone, there was a $100-million additional investment in home care. I think that the honourable member knows

well that community care access centres are delivering substantial increases in care overall.

Mr. Howard Hampton: We'll bring case after case of people who've had their home care hours reduced. But this is about this family. This family cherishes the time that they have with their daughter Alessia, but they know that they cannot continue with only 15 hours of home care when her care involves 24 hours a day around the clock. Alessia's two pediatricians wrote to you. The social worker wrote to you, pointing out that this is just not a sustainable situation, that the family and especially the mother cannot go on. I ask again: Why is Ontario's home care system under the McGuinty government failing families like this who need home care the most?

Hon. George Smitherman: If the honourable member wishes to bring forward cases to my attention, this is fine and fully appropriate.

Overall, the assertions that he makes are incorrect. Substantial increases in home care are resulting in substantial additional people who are able to be served.

He raises a particular circumstance. Of course, on the face of it, it's concerning to all of us, but the Minister of Health is not making the clinical decisions in that case. Across the breadth of the province of Ontario, there are other people who do that. Whenever a decision is made that people don't feel is appropriate, there is an independent mechanism which they can utilize.

I would make my services and those of my staff available to assist the family if that was necessary in bringing forward such an appeal to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board. This is a long-standing mechanism that gets past the idea that a Minister of Health is having discretion over these cases. Instead, there's an independent capacity to analyze any of those viewpoints made by people on the front line.

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Premier. The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity made some very sound recommendations regarding Ontario's growing prosperity gap in its most recent report in 2007. Its expert authors argued that "the new government should assess as a high priority to lower corporate income tax rates to stimulate business investment and to increase provincial tax revenue."

Premier, you pay $1 million a year for this advice. Why, as Ontario slips into have-not status, are you ignoring the recommendations of the economic experts that you fund?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll take this as a "cut" question.

Assuming that we wanted to have an intelligent discussion about our competitiveness associated with the level of our corporate income taxation—and I think there's some merit to having that kind of discussion—we would need the fiscal flexibility in order to engage in that kind of discussion. There are some areas where we know we could invest more quickly to provide more supports to our most vulnerable, particularly to help the poor so they can grow stronger and become productive and contributing members of a stronger economy.

We can't have those kinds of discussions when we continue to send $20 billion to the federal government for distribution in the rest of the country. That's the reality. We're not prepared to cut our taxes now at the expense of our important public services. But there are all kinds of other discussions we could have were we able to retain more of the wealth that we're actually creating here.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm convinced the Premier didn't read the report. The report says that in order to increase provincial tax revenues, business taxes should be cut.

I'd like to read a couple of more quotes from this million-dollar report: "Other than the United States, no other country in the developed world has higher taxes on new business investment than Ontario." I also quote that "Ontario and Canada are losing tax revenue because of high corporate tax rates." This is not a cut question, Premier. This is to increase government revenues.

With your current tax structure, it is no wonder that businesses are shifting investments, jobs and tax liabilities out of Ontario. Will you continue to ignore the advice of the experts now that we are in recession? Will you continue to stand idly by as jobs and revenues disappear, or, as recommended by your million-dollar—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Where the member and I have a fundamental disagreement is that he doesn't see this as a cut question. It is a cut question. They want us to cut taxes by $5 billion. Given our existing revenue base, to cut our tax revenues by $5 billion would absolutely and necessarily mean cuts to our health care, to our education and to supports for our most vulnerable Ontarians. There's no way around that.

We can't have the kinds of discussions that the honourable member would have us enter into unless we have access to more of the wealth that we are actually generating here every year in Ontario. I say again, we should come together and say to the federal government, "Sending $20 billion of our wealth to the rest of the country is simply not fair."

RENT BANK PROGRAMS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Minister of Housing. Debbie Palmer, a single mom and laid-off nurse, needed the help of the rent bank centre in Sault Ste. Marie when she was waiting for EI to start. Today, rent bank centres across Ontario—particularly this one in Sault Ste. Marie, but also in Cobourg, Northumberland and Simcoe county—are all out of funds and turning away families who are facing eviction.

If the minister is so proud of his affordable housing program, why hasn't he committed any money in the 2008 budget for Ontario rent bank centres?

Hon. Jim Watson: As usual, the NDP are a day late. One of our members asked this exact same question and

I'll give the same answer. We're very proud of the rent bank. We've put, to date, $18.8 million into the rent bank, including $4.8 million last year. I indicated that we are committed to funding the rent bank in 2008.

We have asked for a study into its effectiveness and how to improve the rent bank. I received that study about a week or so ago. We anticipate within the next two weeks to have additional funds out to those rent banks that require money because we recognize the value of the rent bank. It prevents evictions of those people who have had a difficult time. As I said yesterday, it has prevented 13,200 evictions in the province of Ontario and saved $7.7 million in emergency shelter costs. It's a great program and we're very proud of it.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Low-income earners rely on rent bank centres because we barely have any affordable housing in this province. According to anti-poverty groups, an affordable monthly rent is 30% of a person's income. For low-wage earners, ODSP and OW recipients, that's less than $500 a month. We just received a letter signed by this minister that says there are only 486 units that rent at $500 or less across the entire province. No wonder we have a waiting list of 170,000 households waiting for affordable housing. How can this minister be proud of providing less than 500 units of truly affordable housing, and he's had five years to do it in?

1450

Hon. Jim Watson: Again, I'd like to correct the NDP. We have provided over $301 million for an affordable housing program that was matched by the previous federal government. It's called the affordable housing program, and it includes a number of components: home ownership, home repair. We also brought in a program of rent subsidies called the ROOF program, and the DOOR program for rent repairs.

When we brought forward $100 million, do you know what the NDP called $100 million in home repairs? "Meagre." To me, that was an insult to the people who are providing affordable housing.

On the rent bank, when my predecessor brought forward the rent bank, do you know what the NDP said? The member from Beaches–East York said, "It means almost nothing."

I would urge the members of the NDP to get your act together and come forward with one sensible position on how—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Farmers in my riding have been asking me about support programs for farmers. They would like to know why the federal government has not matched the level of support that the McGuinty government has provided them.

Last year, you introduced a three-year risk management program for grains and oilseeds producers. Farmers in my riding were very appreciative of this initiative, and the ones I have spoken to indicate that they plan to stay enrolled in this program and hope that it can be continued in the long term.

When the risk management program was developed, you indicated that the McGuinty government would fund its traditional 40% of the farm risk management program and would ask the federal government to kick in its 60% share. Minister, the farmers in my riding want to know, will the federal government finally come forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The member has identified an issue that I hear about regularly from grains and oilseeds farmers. It was because of their good work and their partnership with this government that we were able to implement the risk management program.

I see members on the opposite side of the House smiling. This is a very serious issue and a very important issue for all grains and oilseeds farmers in the province of Ontario. They came and asked for a program. They asked the province to work with them, and they wanted the federal government to be a partner. I was happy to announce last July that the province of Ontario is very prepared to partner with them. In fact, we have come to the table not just with pen in hand, but with dollars. As a result of the agreement we've signed with them, we have delivered $40 million to grains and oilseeds producers. I wrote to the federal minister and asked him to continue to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: This is not the only program where the federal government is shortchanging Ontario farmers. In the fall, you announced $150 million to support cattle, hog and horticulture producers. A federal budget has since come and gone and there has been no announcement from them of meaningful—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This question is not sounding like it relates to the initial question you asked.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It's programs. Farmers in the cattle, hog and horticulture sectors have been especially challenged recently by factors such as the high dollar and high cost of oil. My constituents would like the federal government to come to the table, just like we did, and provide support for risk management. I ask the minister, wouldn't it be easier to support our farmers if we had a real partner in the federal government?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We will continue to attempt to bring the federal government onside with the partnership programs that we have put in place for the farmers in the province of Ontario. I wrote to Minister Ritz and asked him to participate in the risk management program. He wrote back to me and said they would not be prepared to do so.

In December, the Minister of Finance for the province of Ontario responded to the needs in the agriculture sec-

tor for cattle, hogs and horticulture. We've come forward with 150 million new dollars. I know that producers would like the federal government to respond in kind with new dollars, not with advances for existing programs.

We will continue to work with our federal partners to have them understand that we need to have additional resources in difficult times for the agriculture industry. We want to work with them on a program that is flexible, that will meet the needs of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Premier: Last month, you announced with great fanfare the $1.5-billion Next Generation of Jobs Fund. Let's look at the facts here. In the auto sector this past Monday, we had 1,000 jobs laid off. This is about the third such announcement. In the ag sector, we had the Campbell Soup announcement in Listowel, we had the United Food announcement and we had Nestlé's announcement in Chesterville. These are all losses of the agricultural sector—and on top of that, CanGro and others. Last week we had the Dell announcement of job losses in the high-tech sector.

You claim you have some sort of strategy—a jobs fund. I would ask today that you stand up and tell the House where the plan is. What is the plan for your Next Generation of Jobs Fund? Where is the focus for the jobs in this new fund?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm very happy to address this question. We had an opportunity yesterday at estimates committee to talk at full length about the various programs now available in the province of Ontario to reach out and partner with industry to have investment happen in this province.

We spoke about the AMIS program, another budget item that we would like to see the opposition parties vote for, which actually brought the threshold into more manageable ranges for small to medium-sized businesses that are prepared to make advancements in innovation for technology for manufacturing. That's what we want in Ontario, yet these opposition members voted opposed to this.

Our Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which has already delivered a $100-million investment in Ontario by Sanofi Pasteur—that would not have happened without our government's partnership. This is the kind of program that we have available to reach out and bring Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, you're quite correct in the fact that we did have our first opportunity to review the work being done by your ministry. In fact, a member, Mr. Chudleigh, just asked a question on that to show how little you knew about the pathway to prosperity report, which you paid $1 million for. Clearly, by the answers, you had not read Roger Martin's report. I'd encourage members to look at the Hansard of that—

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: That's not true.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the minister to withdraw the comment, please.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I withdraw.

Mr. John O'Toole: If the economy is any judge, you should resign.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Everybody seems to be in quite the mood today, and there are lots of armchair Speakers out there. I appreciate your efforts in assisting me, but there is only one Speaker, and I will do my job.

The member has the floor.

Mr. John O'Toole: What we have here is the minister trying to blame everyone else, but she also gave a little litany of her travel log to China, Mexico and Paris. All in other people's hour of need, you're travelling around, giving out old speeches.

Minister, could you just clearly stand up and show where the plan is, where the leadership is for this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I expect that this member opposite will reflect an accurate position when he speaks on his feet in this House.

Let me say this: Roger Martin has spent time in our ministry, going through at length the reports that we asked him to write for us, because we value experts talking to us about good, sound economic policy. That's why we support Roger Martin, that's why we support the Competitiveness Institute, and we will continue to do so.

I might also remind that member that it was his government that brought Roger Martin to the table with the Ontario government, so you clearly appreciated his view when you sat on this side of the House. Fortunately, times have changed.

Let me say this: I believe it is Ontario's role as an export jurisdiction to take our story around the world about why the whole world should invest in Ontario, the best place to do business in North America.

1500

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. What is the McGuinty government doing about the 13,233 children in Toronto, the 5,145 children in Ottawa and the many thousands more across the province who are eligible and approved but cannot receive licensed not-for-profit child care because the new subsidy program hasn't been adequately funded?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question from the member opposite. As she well knows, and as I trust many members here know, we have changed the eligibility requirements for subsidies across the province.

Prior to this recent change, there was a patchwork of eligibility. In some communities, people with very low incomes were not eligible for subsidies at all. We have greatly expanded the eligibility because we recognize that even low- and moderate-income people need help with subsidies.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But what the minister is not talking about is the fact that there was no funding to help municipalities with the new subsidy formula. A waiting list of more than 23,000 Ontario children unable to obtain affordable licensed child care is nothing to brag about. Instead of making the $300-million provincial investment that the Premier promised five years ago, the minister created a parking lot for tens of thousands of children and has them waiting, year over year, for their opportunity to have a subsidized child care space in this province. Why does this government keep waiting lists rather than keep promises, so families can access the child care that they need?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're working hard for Ontario families, we're working very hard for children in this province and we are committed to improving child care in this province, even after the federal government cancelled the child care funding in this province. I would welcome the support of members opposite in getting a real national child care policy back in this country.

Each municipality does create their own wait list. Each municipality decides who they will prioritize. We are carefully monitoring the situation. I look forward to the recommendations from OMSSA on where we should go next with the child subsidy.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Some of my constituents in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex have expressed concerns about the new Provincial Animal Welfare Act that is before the Legislature. Farmers in particular are asking how the new legislation will affect their farm operations. These constituents, and actually all farmers across the province, are already regulated by current agricultural industry standards with respect to how they treat their animals. As a matter of fact, many commodity organizations have long-standing and well-established best practices for animal husbandry that are adhered to by their producers. Minister, can you please explain to the House how this legislation, if passed, will affect farmers across the province?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for her question and her advocacy of the agricultural sector. Farmers are vital to Ontario and to the provincial economy. Let me make it clear that current agricultural industry standards would be respected and activities in accordance with those standards would be exempted from the proposed Provincial Animal Welfare Act. My ministry will continue to work with the Minister of Agriculture and her staff to ensure that this proposed legislation is proper, that this proposed legislation will ensure that existing industry standards are recognized and respected.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I know that many farmers will be very happy to hear your commitment to working with the agricultural sector on this new legislation.

My riding is predominantly rural, so I also have a number of constituents who enjoy hunting and fishing and I'd like to know from you how this legislation will affect those activities as well.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, I come from a family of hunters and fishermen as well. Hunting and fishing are activities enjoyed by people across Ontario. I would like to clarify for all the members in this House that this legislation will not affect, and will in fact protect, current activities pertaining to wildlife and hunting, fishing and trapping activities that are already regulated by MNR legislation, including the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation. While the Minister of Research and Innovation was toasting himself at the Economic Club in Toronto over the lunch hour today, the community of Listowel, in Perth–Wellington, was reeling from the news of the pending closure of Campbell Soup.

Having ignored prudent warnings for the last two years about the pending crisis in manufacturing, what will the Ministry of Research and Innovation now do to help the 500 people who've lost their jobs in Listowel? And don't refer the question.

Hon. John Wilkinson: As a minister, I realize that my colleagues have responsibility for certain things, and I refer this to the minister responsible, the Minister for Training, Colleges and Universities. I thought the member knew that.

Hon. John Milloy: I think all members of the House, particularly my colleague the Minister of Research and Innovation, are always upset to hear about the layoffs in Listowel. But in all these cases, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities works closely with those workers affected. We've already been in touch with the plant, and when the layoffs occur, we will be setting up with them the sorts of supports they need so that they can get the types of retraining they need so they can move on.

I'm very proud of the fact that our most recent budget contained $1.5-billion program to help workers find further employment. Part of that is the second-career strategy, which will be in place in June. These workers will be eligible for it. It will provide them with additional training.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The Minister of Research and Innovation would have us believe that he's seizing global opportunities and creating Ontario's next generation of jobs and prosperity. It would seem that the only global opportunities being created are in Pennsylvania, where the Listowel jobs are going, and that we're going to have

to wait until the next generation before the minister takes action in his own riding.

The company says it's closing the plant because to stay open would require significant new investment in the facility, which they're not prepared to make. They would have been more likely to do so if Ontario did not have the highest taxes in North America on new business investment. The Campbell Soup closure is but one more step on the road to Ontario becoming a have-not province under the McGuinty Liberals.

My question to the minister is: When will the government wake up and realize the devastating impact of its high-tax policies and address the economic crisis that their tax-and-spend budgets are causing?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very proud of the strategy of this government, the five-point strategy which the Minister of Research and Innovation is part of, to strengthen our economy and to create jobs for the next generation. As the honourable member is aware, there are literally 100,000 jobs that go wanting in this province every year because of lack of skills, which is why our most recent budget contained a $1.5-billion Skills to Action jobs plan, which is going to help those workers who have been affected by layoffs get the skills they need to find another job.

My ministry is working closely with the Minister of Research and Innovation and with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade to create the types of opportunities which are going to create those job opportunities for those who have been affected. How dare he stand up, from a government that is looking for nothing but cuts, and criticize a government that has put forward a plan to support those workers who have been affected.

ONTARIO CHILD BENEFIT

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. In today's mail, parents received this shocking news. The notice to Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program recipients states: "You will receive less from social assistance. Your new monthly Ontario child benefit payment and your full national child benefit will make up the difference." Otherwise, they tread water. Today Carol Goar exposed this in the Toronto star.

Why won't the McGuinty government stop punishing the poorest of poor children, end the clawback and implement the full Ontario child benefit for all children today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm proud of the fact that we're the first government in Canada that has put forward an Ontario child benefit. I'm especially proud of the fact that we're doing this at a time of real economic challenge. It would have been argued, I'm very certain, in other circles that now is not the time to reach out in this particular direction because it's too challenging for us. But in terms of giving expression to our shared values, we think we need to do more to ensure that our kids grow up strong and receive all the opportunities they need to become contributing and productive members of our society. So I'm proud of the fact that we are the first government in Canada to develop a specific benefit dedicated to Ontario children.

1510

Mr. Michael Prue: I have to ask if the Premier is also proud of the fact that children on social assistance continue to live on incomes well below the poverty line. Is he proud of the fact that in August, his government will eliminate the back-to-school allowance? Is he proud of the fact that in November it will take away the winter clothing allowance payments as well?

I have written to ministers, I have asked questions in this House and I have never received a response other than what I got today. So I ask again in hope against hope: Are winter coats, boots and school supplies now a luxury that some Ontario children have to do without?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's be really clear about what the Ontario child benefit is. It's a benefit for all low-income children in the province. It does involve a restructuring of social assistance because it allows the child portion of a social assistance cheque to move with the parent as they move from social assistance into those entry-level jobs.

It is a major improvement in how we support low-income children in this province, and I really do wish that the members opposite would support such innovation and such an enormous investment in the lowest-income children in this province.

TORONTO WATERFRONT

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. As you know, the revitalization of Toronto's waterfront is critical to ensuring the future prosperity and high quality of life in our city. The positive effect of waterfront revitalization is being seen first-hand in my community of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, where shovels are in the ground, turning forgotten, abandoned and inaccessible waterfront to a place where our community will gather, bike-ride, rollerblade and picnic.

But it is critical that as we have invested in Mimico Linear Park, we do so and ensure that the province plays a role in ensuring that the rest of Toronto's waterfront continues to be revitalized. So will the minister please tell me what actions are being taken to ensure access to the waterfront and development of environmentally sustainable communities within the city of Toronto?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question, but also for her passion and advocacy when it comes to the revitalization of the city of Toronto's waterfront.

Our government remains committed to creating livable communities for the people of Ontario. That is why revitalizing Toronto's waterfront, mainly the West Don Lands, is a priority project for the province and for the people of Toronto. A lot of work has taken place to

prepare the West Don Lands for future development and to turn this piece of land into a viable community for the city.

I'm proud to say that Ontario is leading the charge in key pieces of this project, such as the construction of a flood protection land form known as the berm, which will have the capacity to protect the entirety of Toronto's downtown core from natural disasters, as we have seen previously, like Hurricane Hazel, and enable future occupancy in the West Don Lands. It's a proactive, adaptive strategy for dealing with future climate change and a necessary catalyst for large-scale redevelopment of the West Don Lands.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: In my community in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the damage that was undertaken by Hurricane Hazel so many years ago is still legendary. So I appreciate the minister's indication that other communities would be protected from other environmental and natural disasters like Hurricane Hazel.

I would ask whether or not our government is committed to working in partnership with the city of Toronto to continue to build a foundation of sustainable development, and I would ask the minister to provide some specific details with respect to the activities Torontonians can expect to see in the West Don Lands now that that critical berm is in place?

Hon. David Caplan: We have made real progress with Toronto's waterfront redevelopment and revitalization in helping the city of Toronto—and with our partners in the federal government, I'll add—to develop a more complete community where Ontarians can live, work and play.

Just last week I had the great pleasure to announce the development partner for phase 1 of the West Don Lands. I would say that this is a tipping point to the revitalization of Toronto's waterfront. Phase 1 is the first step toward a $250-million private sector investment in waterfront revitalization and demonstrates both private and public sector commitment to partner with Waterfront Toronto.

This proposal embraces key provincial objectives such as creating inclusive communities, reducing urban sprawl, transit-first approaches and leveraging the creation of public parks and spaces. We're working hard to attract international award-winning developers and designers to come and invest in Ontario, and that's why this province has committed $500 million in funding to the Toronto waterfront revitalization.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Premier. Not only is the economy at a point where we've become a have-not province, when it comes to health care, we're headed in the same direction. When we take a look at health care in Ottawa, specifically Ottawa–Orléans, we learn that thousands of residents who rely on the Orleans Urgent Care Clinic are facing a decline in service. Why? Because there are not enough doctors. Marion Moritz, the executive director the clinic stated, "All the doctors we are recruiting have left for greener pastures. We are bleeding doctors."

I ask you: What are you going to do? You made promises more than four years ago that there would be more doctors and that you would unclog emergency rooms. Nothing has happened.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: First, on the matter of doctors, the honourable member obviously ignored all the information that has come out even in the last week or two from the college of physicians in the province of Ontario and, indeed, from the survey on the national basis, which shows that the number of doctors practising in Ontario is up by 13% in the last five years.

But I do agree that in the particular circumstances of Orléans we do not have the health care system performing as it should. I've been working on this matter closely with my colleague the member for Ottawa–Orléans, and I have to say, in respect of the progress that we've made, it hasn't been good enough, and I take full responsibility for that. By coincidence or not, this afternoon, I have a resolve meeting in my office where people will be bringing their very best ideas, as there have been some proposals floated which we think will be very helpful and beneficial to the people of Orléans, and I hope, alongside my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans, to soon be in a position to make such an announcement.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Again to the Premier: The reality is, if the minister wants to talk about facts and figures, only about 10% of physicians today are accepting new patients. When we were in office, it was over 20%. There's no improvement. The number of underserviced communities has increased from about 121 to about 142. The reality is, there were a million people without a family doctor then, and there are still today. There's simply no progress being made.

I'll say to you, the situation in Ottawa is so grim that Councillor Rainer Bloess is calling for the resignation of the member from Ottawa–Orléans for failing to keep his promise for better health care. What are you going to do to meet the needs of the people in Ottawa–Orléans?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, I'm very, very privileged to work alongside this member from Ottawa–Orléans.

Let me correct some information. Last year in the province of Ontario, fully 85% of Ontario's doctors took new patients, on average almost 50. The Ontario Health Quality Council will soon show that the number of Ontarians without access to care is more in the neighbourhood of 400,000, not the high numbers that the member likes to inflate for her own political purposes. Here is what the executive director of the Orleans Urgent Care Clinic had to say today in response to that attack by a friend of yours. They said, "Mr. McNeely has advocated strongly on behalf of the clinic and has opened doors for us in the MOH." They said, "From 1994 until Phil McNeely's election, the MOH turned a deaf ear to every and all entreaties made by the Ottawa Orleans Urgent

Care Clinic." I have visited there alongside that member, and we will be back for a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

1520

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is for the Premier; the minister isn't here.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We don't make references to the absence of individuals.

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Erlene Weaver is a Hamilton grandmother forced to raise her grandchildren, Jordon and Alicia, both of whom are victims of fetal alcohol syndrome. For over six years, Erlene received temporary care assistance through the Ontario Works program. Despite her fixed pension and financial hardships, she was cut off from this child care assistance. Erlene is just one example of many Hamilton grandparents in the same situation. Why have grandparents like Erlene been cut off from temporary care assistance?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't speak to the specifics of the issue. It's obviously a case of some real hardship. What I can undertake to do, on behalf of the minister, is to look into this more closely to see if it's at all possible to work with the family and the service providers to improve the circumstances.

Mr. Paul Miller: Premier, I don't know if you get it here. We have grandparents giving up their meagre pension income to raise their grandchildren because the ministry allowed the little money provided for the grandchildren's upkeep to be taken away.

When will the minister or the Premier reinstate the temporary care assistance to these grandparents who are in dire need? This is a shame.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I have given my undertaking on behalf of the minister. We will look into this at the earliest possible opportunity and find a way to connect with the member to see what, if anything, we can do to provide support.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Mike Colle: To the Minister of Research and Innovation: Yesterday, at the Premier's innovation award night, Cameron Piron from my riding, the president and co-founder of Sentinelle Medical Inc., was awarded one of these prestigious awards for innovation. His globally competitive company is involved in the research and manufacturing of leading-edge magnetic resonance imaging, also known as MRI.

This breakthrough entrepreneur has been awarded this prestigious Premier's award for innovation. Could the minister please tell me why it is important for us to recognize these innovators in ridings like Eglinton–Lawrence and recognize what these innovators contribute to our economy and to our society in general? Minister, please answer the question.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend from Eglinton–Lawrence for actually asking me a question for my ministry. I thought that was great. You understand the rules here, sir. I want to say that you should, and everyone in your riding should, be particularly—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the member that directly or indirectly making an accusation or taking a shot at another member is not appropriate.

Hon. John Wilkinson: A wise ruling, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the member and all the members that they should be particularly proud of Cameron Piron and all of his business colleagues at Sentinelle Medical Inc. We had a wonderful event last night at the MaRS discovery district. The Premier was there and we were able to see some 10 amazing Ontarians—business leaders, entrepreneurs and cutting-edge researchers. One of your constituents was one of those recipients. He has come up with a wonderful new technology that allows for much better detection of breast cancer. He should be commended for that and for the pain and suffering that he has alleviated for so many women.

As well, we want to thank the other brilliant researchers. There were researchers there last night, two of whom have developed brand new disciplines of science—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member for the question.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Reverend Rudy Plug and Trinity United Church in Beeton for sending this petition.

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I agree with this petition and I've signed it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I've got a petition signed by people in my riding and in Etobicoke, and it's a petition to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I affix my name to this petition and I give it to legislative page Mikaela.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a series of petitions that have been presented to me from my riding of Durham. This one is from the Clarington Older Adult Association in Bowmanville, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its" rightful "place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I'm pleased to sign this in support, and to present it to Naomi, one of the new pages here.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to read in this petition, which was brought to my office for me to read on behalf of my constituents from Niagara Falls.

"Whereas" the government "has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings;

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe;

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I'm pleased to submit this on behalf of my riding.

GYPSY MOTHS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to present a petition called "Protecting Ontario Properties from Gypsy Moth Infestation," signed by residents of Binbrook, Mount Hope and Caistor.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas gypsy moths are a dangerous pest because they can nest in more than 500 different native plant species; and

"Whereas professional arborists have estimated that thousands of acres in Ontario have been deforested by gypsy moths; and

"Whereas many properties in Binbrook, west Niagara, Haldimand and surrounding areas have been dramatically harmed by gypsy moths; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario has previously funded a cost-shared gypsy moth spraying program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources immediately fund a gypsy moth spraying program to assist landowners and municipalities attempting to control further gypsy moth infestation."

In support, my signature.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Jeff Leal: I just got a rushed petition from the good citizens of Eglinton–Lawrence: "Stop Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles—Bill 56.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass" immediately "Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

As I am in agreement with this, I have affixed my signature and given it to page Matthew.

1530

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kuldip Kular: "Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Western Mississauga Ambulatory Surgery Centre

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with the petitioners, so I put my signature on the petition as well.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to present a petition entitled, "Petition for the Creation of Pope John Paul II Day," signed by residents of the Niagara area. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities; and

"Whereas Bill 194, the Pope John Paul II Day Act, 2007 did not pass before the Legislature was adjourned three weeks early for summer recess;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario designate a day as Pope John Paul II Day in honour of his extraordinary contribution to our communities."

In support, I affix my signature.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, its largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact on the quality care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I will affix my signature and pass this to Sheilagh.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. John O'Toole: Normally I'd be presenting the Lord's Prayer petition, but I have so many others that I will read this as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

"Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from the McGuinty government, at any level;

"We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future."

I'm pleased to sign this in support of this community and present it to Hannah, one of the new pages.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is in conjunction with Bill 56, which was introduced by the honourable member for Eglinton–Lawrence. It reads as follows:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

Since I agree with this petition 100%, I'm delighted to sign it as well.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare funding. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with a growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas studies indicate that overcrowded emergency rooms result in higher mortality rates; and

"Whereas growing demand and lack of available long-term-care beds places increased pressure on acute care beds; and

"Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare must reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services for the people of Muskoka-East Parry Sound and allocate more long-term-care beds for Muskoka-East Parry Sound."

I support this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from Patricia Thompson, who lives at 6363 Amber Glen, Mississauga, Ontario.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. David Caplan: I move that, pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order, when the order of the day is called for resuming the adjourned debate on the amendment to the motion for adoption of amendments to the standing orders, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the

motion and any amendments thereto, which questions shall be decided without further amendment or debate. If a recorded vote is requested, the division bells shall be limited to five minutes and no deferral of the division pursuant to standing order 28(h) shall be permitted.

1540

This particular motion relates to, as it says, the changes in the standing orders which have been proposed. This has generated a great deal of debate amongst members here in the chamber. From the debate as I listen to it, there's agreement, I believe, on 95% of the matters that are in front. There is a very small amount where there is some disagreement, and I think that's very fair, but I think in the interests of moving forward, we should move ahead, have a vote on this, have legislators have a chance to decide and then test and see. I know that the government House leader has proposed that over the course of the summer these standing order changes will be reviewed by a legislative committee. So in order to get things moving along, I think it will be important to support this motion, although for the purpose of clarity, I'd like to move an amendment to the motion.

I move that the motion be amended by striking the word "motion" in the fourth line and substituting "main motion."

I look forward to hearing the debate on today's motion that is in front of all members of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Madam Speaker, can we have clarification on what implications that change would have?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I will read the amendment for clarity's sake.

"The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal has moved that the motion be amended by striking the word "motion" in the fourth line and substituting 'main motion.'"

Does that clarify for the members what the intent of the amendment is? Okay.

Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: We've had a lot of concerns about the process that the government has used in making changes to the standing orders. I guess we've been concerned that there was no opportunity for all three parties to come together and unanimously—or at least reach some consensus as to what the changes might be. As you well know, these changes were made in a way that the press received them first, and the two opposition parties received them next. There was never, ever any time for us to determine or have an opportunity to discuss the reasons for the changes being made or to make some decisions as to how they might better meet the test of accountability to the people in the province of Ontario and deal with some of the issues of concern to us.

I would say to you that we have proposed an amendment. Our amendment would change the question period time from 10:45 to 1 o'clock. Our main objection to the standing order changes, which are drastically going to alter the time of the Legislature's sittings, is the time of question period. Question period is going to move from a starting time of approximately 2 o'clock every day to 10:45 in the morning. We are quite concerned about that because we believe that question period is probably the most important time of the day. It is an opportunity for us to hold the government accountable and, regrettably, there are some implications to the ability of the opposition parties to do so. There are also implications for the press, who have indicated that there's a problem as far as their ability to hold the government to account.

I just want to go to a letter that was received by the NDP which I think probably addresses the whole issue of question period quite effectively. Professor Graham White, a respected individual who actually spent six years in the Clerk's office of the assembly, has indicated that he is of the opinion, the view—"I am firmly of the view that the proposal to move question period into the morning represents a serious and entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the assembly in performing one of its key functions, holding the government to account."

I guess that is our key concern as well. We simply don't believe that there's going to be the same opportunity to hold the government to account if question period starts at 10:45. We have no problem with starting the day earlier, as it's going to now, at 9 o'clock. We're quite prepared to do that. In fact, if it was 8 or 7, we would be prepared to be here as well.

Probably, the only change that's going to happen is for staff: the people who support this Legislature and some of the members, who drive in every day. It's going to mean that instead of getting up at perhaps 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock and coming into this place—because of the gridlock we experience now around the city of Toronto and around the GTA, and wherever you might be coming from, whether it's Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Oshawa, Barrie or Newmarket, it is going to mean that both the staff and the members are just simply going to have to get up earlier. Obviously, there would be a change to some people's schedules.

But Professor Graham White goes on to say that "moving question period into the morning would very seriously detract from the strongest accountability mechanism available to the opposition." He goes on to say that because we have a majority government—and we usually do in this province—"It is vitally important for the people's elected representatives to be able to hold the government to account for its policy and administration."

So that's why it is so important that we oppose the change to the standing period time, because it is the most effective mechanism for fostering government accountability and for keeping the people—and this is important—in the province of Ontario aware of what's going on in this Legislature: aware of the bills that are being debated, the bills that are being introduced and the opportunity to hold the government accountable for their successes and their failures.

For example, today, we held the government to account when it comes to the economy. We now understand that, according to the TD report, this government in the province of Ontario is headed in a direction which will lead us to become a have-not province. This is a province which used to be the leading province in all of Canada when it came to the economy. We were the economic engine of Ontario, and today we learn that we're dead last.

It's that type of information that we need to be able to communicate to the public. We need to make them aware of the government's successes, and in this case, the fact that they've taken no action to turn the economy around. They've simply continued to blame others, whether it's the federal government, the dollar or oil prices. We need that opportunity to hold the government accountable for their actions. Also, the government needs to be given the opportunity—and we do too—when there are successes, to be able to speak to those as well.

1550

Question period is the most important part of every day. It is the only legislative proceeding to which the media pays regular attention, and, I would dare say, it is the time of day when the most people in this province pay any attention. I know many people who will turn it on for question period, and then they turn it off. So an "effective question period is essential to the health of democracy in this province," and we're now going to change it from about 2 o'clock to 10:45.

Why is this a problem? Again, I want to quote from Graham White. He says—and he knows; he was here for six years—that it will severely undercut the effectiveness of question period. He goes to say that you need to plan, you need to research and you need to reflect if you're going to pose questions to the government of the day.

Now, this is sometimes a challenge even in the afternoon, but it certainly is going to be made more impossible by having it at 10:45. The opposition parties need to find the facts, they need to process the facts, they need to locate, and they need to contact the experts inside and outside of the government. They need to solicit factual information and opinion from people and organizations who are affected by the government's bills, the government's actions; these people need to have their opinions considered in this Legislature. And they need to organize whatever material they have been able to gather into a coherent question period strategy.

Despite your efforts to do a lot of this the day before, it's not always possible, because a lot of question period, as we saw today again, speaking about the economy and the fact that we're now going to be dead last in Canada, really depends on the information that you see in the media. A lot of it requires an immediate response, and you can't prepare for it the night before. Many of the questions that we ask, as reflected today, originate in stories that are published in newspapers, on the TV and on the radio, and the newspapers are not published until the morning.

It also takes time to make sure that the information you hear or read about is factually correct, and of course, you always need to do some further research if you're going to have an effective question. This is a reason why we oppose the change in the time of question period. We hope that the government will consider our amendment to change the question period time to a set time of 1 o'clock today. If they're really serious about listening to the opposition and thoughtfully considering why this change is necessary in order to make sure that we can hold them accountable, and make sure that the will of the people is reflected, I would urge them to support our amendment today.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Here we are, addressing yet another time allocation motion from the government, older members of which howled in protest when they sat in opposition and governments of the day introduced similar time allocation motions. To be fair, there were—oh, my goodness, how shocking—four days of debate, four sessional days of debate on the motion that would dramatically alter the standing orders, including shifting question period in a most dramatic way.

Now, let's understand that's not four whole calendar days, is it? We're not talking about eight hours a day of debate when we talk about four days of debate so far. We're not talking about six. We're not talking about four. We're talking about maybe two or two and a half hours a day during the course of those four days.

So let's not pretend that somehow there was some long protracted process taking place here that in any way, shape or form had the potential or the capacity of derailing this majority government's insidious plan. Let's not delude ourselves. Are you with me on that one?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Absolutely.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I hope so.

Four sessional days of debate, on a good day, maybe a total of 10 hours. We have 10 New Democrats. How many Conservatives in the official opposition?

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's 26.

Mr. Peter Kormos: And then the balance of members of this Legislature as well, who I presume—dare I be presumptuous?—would want their constituents to know, either now, currently, or maybe a week, a year, two years or five years down the road, why they would support the burying of question period in the morning hours of the day.

That's what it boils down to, don't it, Speaker? You've listened, and I know there's been nat, nat, nat about starting at 9, starting at 10. Look, I'll start at 8. Do you guys want to start at 7 a.m.? I'll start at 7 a.m. I'm fine. I'll be here. I've worked shift work, do you understand what I'm saying? I've worked the occasional double shift, I've worked midnights—and I'm not 25 anymore. I'm not 35 either, but I'm pretty confident—

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Looking good, though.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The member says. I take those kinds of compliments anywhere, any time I can. I appreciate it.

But look, that isn't the issue. Let me put this to you. Will you indulge me? Will you permit me? Thank you, Speaker. If there's anything that can be declared to be the de facto property of the opposition, it's question period. The introduction of government backbench questions to question period is a relatively new phenomenon. In fact, question period—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Yes, it is—a relatively new phenomenon.

Mr. Tim Hudak: What year?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, in the lifetime of a whole lot of Ontarians. Mr. Hudak wants me to come up with the year, the month, the day. Well, I'm sorry. I've disappointed him, probably once again.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You should do your research.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's the whole point. It was well before my time; let's put it that way, okay, Mr. Hudak? Well before my time.

But the introduction of government backbench questions is relatively recent. It is also almost inevitably a direct violation to standing orders, as we often note, being referred to the standing orders by myself and more than a few others—most specifically standing order 36(d), along withstanding order 36(a). One has to question how relevant backbench member questions are to question period.

That's not to say that from time to time in the history of government backbench questions there haven't been hard-hitting backbench questions. They're oh, so rare, but when a member does ask them, boy, oh boy, does it change the temperature in this place rapidly. It is a real delight to behold. It really is; it really, really is, because, what happens now?

Let's understand this; let's be perfectly clear. The minister has an office that writes the backbench question for the questioner, who then stands up when his or her time comes and either displays great reading skills or marginal reading skills and reads the question. It's inevitably lengthy, it's inevitably not related to something that's an urgent matter or a matter of express public concern, but it's a fluff question, a lob ball, the old underhanded pitch. The minister will then read the answer and display his or her reading skills, or lack thereof, and then the government backbencher will turn the page. I remember seeing some backbenchers' questions in this government where I've noticed, as it's being dropped to the floor, that at the bottom of the question it says, "Turn the page," so the backbencher doesn't foul up.

Look, we're talking about people who sit idle for lengthy periods of time. It's just like your car: If you leave it sitting for a couple of years there, the tires are going to deflate and you're liable to get some rust inside those cylinders, if you don't squirt some oil down there before you put her away—right, Mr. Miller? You can't just leave an engine idle. But, you see, we've got a whole lot of backbenchers here who sit idle for protracted periods of time, so it's important to give them as explicit a set of directions as possible.

1600

Question 1 at the bottom: "Turn page for question 2." I'm not criticizing. I'm not condemning anybody. I understand, because, you see, there's an impression on the part of backbenchers from the government that if they ask a question, somehow it gives them some exposure here in the Legislature. I suppose it does, but you can get that as readily by sitting behind the Premier, assuming that the minister who usually sits behind the Premier isn't there, and making sure that you lean to one side or the other. You've got to understand what the camera angle is when you sit behind the Premier in an empty seat or, indeed, if you have the privilege and luxury of sitting beside the Premier, should from time to time the Minister of Finance not be able to be here.

I've seen government backbenchers literally sneak—my neighbour's dog Cheech: Cheech was out. I was at the market on Saturday morning, and I came back, because at the market some young folks sell homemade dog biscuits and Cheech knows I show up with dog biscuits. So Cheech—

Mr. Mike Colle: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I can't recognize the member; he's not in his seat.

Mr. Mike Colle: What's the dog Cheech got to do with this?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Continue the debate, please.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

You sit and listen, Mr. Colle, and I'm going to tell you what relevance Cheech has to this debate.

So there I am: I pull up the truck in front of the house down on Bald Street, and the neighbours, Bruce and Charlotte, are out in their backyard and Cheech is there. Now, Cheech has been very well trained not to cross the property line, even though we share—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Colle notes that Cheech is his uncle's name. His uncle is not my neighbour's dog—please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I'd remind the member to try to address other members by their ridings and not their names.

Mr. Peter Kormos: My neighbour's dog Cheech is my neighbour's dog. It's a dog, for Pete's sake. But Cheech knows—a very smart dog—not to cross the property line. It'll sit there right on the edge. But the neighbours come over to the patio, and I pull out of my pocket a little package of these dog biscuits—homemade, from the Welland market square—and Cheech starts creeping across the line. Do you know dogs that'll do that? Just an inch at a time. First the nose goes across, the snout, and then paw after paw, and before you know it Cheech is, like, five feet into my yard, not that I mind.

But that's what I've seen government backbenchers do, sitting beside the Premier. They keep crowding the Premier because they want a part of the shot, right? They want to get right in there. They're leaning over. They're darn near sitting on the Premier's lap. Watch here, you'll

see it. The Premier doesn't know who they are. You see, there are no photographs on the little seating chart here.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Standing order 23(b) directs the member to direct his speech to the question under discussion. As interesting as the anecdotes and the digressions are, they have drifted from the topic under discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member for his point and will remind all members that we are speaking to a particular motion and expect that these stories will come back to the motion that's on the floor. Thank you.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you, Speaker.

Let me explain it this way. I know this is abstract and it's a little difficult for some, but if I am going back to Welland from Toronto, I can take either the Gardiner Expressway, the QEW and 406—zoom—assuming there aren't, of course, huge traffic jams on the QEW, or I can take Highway 2 along the lake here through Port Credit and I can join up with Highway 20. You know where that is, Speaker. I'll still get to Welland, but it takes a little longer. So, you see, the point I'm getting to is that I'm making a point here, and there are two ways to make a point: You can either drive the QEW and get there fast—far less entertaining, far less pleasant, far less scenery to enjoy on the way there, and you get a far lesser understanding of what Ontario is all about—or you can take Highway 2 and Highway 20 down through the heart of the Niagara region. I'm getting to my point.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Close to my house.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Close to the Hudak homestead.

I'm getting to the point, you see, but some people over here always want to take the highway; they don't care about small-town Ontario. They don't care about those little burgs, villages and hamlets that make this province and this country the wonderful place that it is. So what I'm saying is, I understand.

The other problem is that a whole lot of folks in our society nowadays want instant gratification. They want it now. They don't want to have to work for it. It's far easier for a government backbencher to have a scripted question that he or she gets to ask and have that Warholian fame—and it's not even 15 minutes; it's like a minute and a half—than it is for a government backbencher to stand up and participate in a debate. Not with the Coles Notes from the whiz kids—what did Mr. Murdoch call them? Never mind what Mr. Murdoch called them—in the Premier's office. And what I have noted over the course of two decades now is that somebody has kept the template for those Coles Notes, because there are some Coles Notes being used that I recall back from over 20 years ago. It's true. Regardless of the regime change and regardless of the colour of the flag that waves outside here, the Coles Notes, the cheat notes, appear to remain the same.

What I'm trying to explain is: Why do we have debate? Lord knows, the days are long gone when you've got governments that aren't controlled by the Premier's office. Mr. Zimmer is well aware of that. Governments control not by elected people but by unelected people and, increasingly agonizingly, by unelected people who aren't even in the Premier's office: the pollsters, the consultants and the bloggers. It's incredibly frustrating for that to be the case; I resent it myself.

So we know that when the marching orders come down and when there are any number of government backbenchers—which is an unfair term, because not all of them sit on the backbenches. There isn't enough room in the backbenches for all of the backbenchers. Government backbenchers—heck, some of them sit here. A backbencher is a term used to refer to somebody who's not in cabinet. I'm not sure whether it applies to PAs or not—parliamentary assistants or not.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: See, that's the problem. You want to acquire an ability, at the very least, to read body language here, if not minds. During question period—the government has some very capable ministers in its cabinet. The government also has some ministers in its cabinet who, when they stand up to answer a question, you see half a dozen backbenchers looking saying, "I could do better than that," and, "Why is she or he there instead of me? I could do better than that." We got backbenchers who run out in their pyjamas on cold winter mornings with slippered feet, grabbing the morning papers to see which cabinet minister got himself or herself into trouble last night, because just maybe the door might open or at least the phone will ring.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speak of the devil.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Don't get the wrong impression. I truly do enjoy listening to speeches from the member. However, let us refer again to the standing orders—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member needs to put the point of order very succinctly, please.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Order 23(h) prohibits the making of an allegation against another member, and 23(i) prohibits the imputing of false or unavowed motives to another member. In both of these cases, Speaker, I find that the anecdote does transgress the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member for his point and remind all members to please be careful about impugning any other members in their speeches. I return the floor to the member from Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I thank the member for his point as well. And for Pete's sake, will he stop riding my coattails during this afternoon's sitting? If he wants to get on Hansard and on television, just stand up.

1610

The member for Mississauga–Streetsville is a perfectly capable storyteller. I've listened to him here in this Legislature. I've encouraged him, quite frankly, to speak more often. I've encouraged him, equally frankly, to use his full 20 minutes available to him as a follow-up speaker. But for Pete's sake: Look, I understand, but get your

own press on your own time. Get your own Hansard during your own 20 minutes. I've got a scarce hour available to me, and I've only got 26 minutes left and I'm nowhere near finished what I'm talking about; nowhere near.

We're talking about why we have debates. Your folks, the people who vote for you or don't vote for you, have a right to know why you're voting a particular way on a particular issue. Your folks, the people who vote or don't vote for you in your riding, have a right to have their stories told in this chamber. You're their voice; that's why they elect you. They have a right to have their stories told. They have a right to get some information about why a particular bill or policy is or isn't relevant to them and why a particular bill or policy should or shouldn't be supported. They have a right to know why a particular bill or policy, from your point of view, is or is not being voted for by their representative.

This is indeed a sadly premature time allocation motion because, while all but maybe one New Democrat has spoken to the matter—there are only 10 of us; we understand that—there still remain Conservative members who I believe have not spoken to the matter, and more than a few government members. I would dearly, passionately, want to see a process here that from time to time—merely from time to time; not every time, not even most of the time, but maybe just from time to time—reflects the government's respect for members of all political stripes, regardless of where they sit, because that's what Dalton McGuinty promised, huh? Mr. McGuinty promised that the role of the backbencher was going to become more meaningful. Mr. McGuinty promised that the opposition was going to be given more regard. Well, let's start talking about keeping promises—or more breaking of them, as the case might be.

For the opposition, it's about the timing of question period. I've heard any number of people speak. People are protesting a little too much, because there are many members here—most—who work very hard, and some who probably don't work very hard at all. That's just the odds. That's just the stats. That's just the nature of the human beast. But certainly most. Hard work is all relative, isn't it? Nobody here sleeps in. I can't think of a single person whom I know to be a sleeping-in kind of person. Everybody here—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Some of them sleep here.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Yakabuski interjects. I have witnessed that from time to time, sir, but I wasn't about to expose those people who might have been up all night working with constituents.

I remember Morton Shulman sitting over here, and one of my predecessors, Ellis Morningstar—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ellis Morningstar. What a great lad.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Yes, he was.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He was a great lad.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ellis Morningstar was the Conservative MLA/MPP for Welland. Ellis sat here for at least 30 years. As a matter of fact, he was the predecessor to Mel Swart. Mel Swart broke the Tory stronghold in Welland. It took him a long time to do it—many, many runs.

Ellis's lieutenant, his capo, was a fellow named Frank Sorrentino, whom I knew well. I knew well Ellis well, too, but not as well as Frank Sorrentino, because Frank Sorrentino was a real estate agent. Frank Sorrentino was mentored by one of my mentors, Alan Goodman, a very, very capable lawyer who eventually became a judge in the Ontario Court of Appeal. His daughter Susan is now in the court herself, sitting on the bench.

Ellis lived out on Alberta Street. He was a foreman over at Page-Hersey Tubes. When the House was sitting, he took the train in. Page-Hersey Tubes, as industrial employers would be wont to, were more than prepared to accommodate him, especially as a government member, for the obvious reasons. There was no Integrity Commissioner, there was no Ombudsman, to speak of but a few.

Ellis was very popular. Those were the days when an MPP could fix things: A phone call to the minister and you could get a job in a liquor store; a phone call to the minister and your workers' comp file would be accelerated. It's true. I've seen a whole lot of the correspondence. Oh, a few of the right things said, done, including the right political donations, and you'd be appointed a justice of the peace or a judge. I suppose some things never change.

Ellis held court—because there were no constituency offices—and his lovely wife was, of course, his constituency assistant. She took the phone calls at home.

We have a colleague here, John Yakabuski. His father served here in the same type of environment. Frank Miller—

Mr. Norm Miller: There were no constituency assistants.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, the member's spouse was the constituency assistant. Please.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's right.

So Ellis's basement, Saturday morning—and Frank Sorrentino was the gatekeeper. Frank Sorrentino would accept you because you came bearing gifts. This I know because I was there. Ellis had shelvage after shelvage on his basement walls filled with bottles of booze. And people would come—my kind of people—Eastern Europeans, some of them just new immigrants. They had troubles of one sort or another. But you would no more think of going to Ellis's basement on a Saturday morning without a bottle of booze than you would think of going to church without a quarter for the collection plate. So Ellis's basement, with just rows and rows of bottles of booze—not that Ellis didn't drink a few himself.

One day, Morty Shulman, something of an upstart in NDP ranks, smuggled a—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, Morty's dead. Morty's gone.

He smuggled a camera into the chamber. Ellis was sitting in the government benches, and Ellis was a very, very large man. He had the pants that come up to here

and the tie that was short enough so it just barely met the pants. He wore those draped, you know. He was a big man, big hands. He comes from a Pennsylvania Dutch background.

Ellis had his hands folded on the top part of his chest—because they were comfortable there, they weren't going to slide off—and he had fallen asleep. Well, Morty Shulman, who I admire a great deal—admired and continue to admire—who I knew and who I had great respect for, to be fair, Morty Shulman knew a lot of things but he didn't understand small-town Ontario. He took a snapshot of Ellis Morningstar with his hands folded on his huge—as a matter of fact, it's called an alderman. Did you know that? The colloquial for a huge belly was an "alderman." Check it. It's a wonderful use of the word. "Look at the alderman on that politician." Of course, the origin of the word "alderman" was the Tammany Hall type of politics, these fellows who didn't have any shortage of food or drink.

Shulman then released the photo. He did one of those gotcha moments, "Aha, I caught Ellis Morningstar sleeping." And I have no doubt that Ellis was. But Ellis sputtered a little bit. He said, "Of course I wasn't sleeping, but I closed my eyes for a few minutes because I was up late last night working on workers' compensation files until at least 1 or 2 in the morning. My eyes got weary and I felt the need to rest my eyes for about a couple of minutes. But asleep? Of course not."

Ellis Morningstar only spoke around once a year in the Legislature, and that was for very brief periods of time, but he was a person who had considerable influence, as the Conservative inner circle did in those days, with those types of governments. Those days are long gone now. More is expected of members now than was expected of them then. Of course you can't get a job for somebody's brother-in-law in the liquor store simply by making a phone call. You can't get them a job at all. Things don't work that way any more, and thank goodness. It means—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Yakabuski interjects. Maybe things in Renfrew haven't caught up with the rest of Ontario, but I suspect they have.

People have high expectations of their members, and one of them should be that their members participate in debate. The other expectation that people should have of this chamber is that this isn't a rubber stamp. This isn't the politburo, for Pete's sake. We shouldn't let decisions get made—we do, regrettably—in the Premier's office or down there on Bay Street, just south of here, and then shipped into the Legislature just to be rubber-stamped, with a bunch of marionettes nodding their heads, voting as they're instructed. At the very least, members could read the legislation before they vote on it. Is that too much to ask?

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I don't want to make any allegations about any member, but it seems to me I've heard more than a few of them talk about more than a few bills, be it here or in committee, and reveal thereby that they hadn't read the legislation. They hadn't even read the explanatory notes. Come on, at least read the explanatory notes. But by all means, don't just rely on the ministerial cheat sheets, which give you the government's spin.

One of the regrettable things about government and politics in general is that it's all about spin, it's all about spin and more spin. Is that what the public wants or deserves? Doesn't the public want and deserve the straight goods? Wouldn't they love to hear some straight talk? Wouldn't they like to hear some frank and candid—dare I say honest but for fear of violating the standing orders, because to say "honest" implies that some aren't being honest—responses to questions?

Why is the government trying to relegate question period to a morning audience? Let's understand, governments don't do these things unless it's in the interests of the government. There is nothing whatsoever altruistic about partisan politics, least of all once you get inside the chamber. No quarter is given.

Could one of the pages get me a glass of water? I've got to fuel up a little bit.

Governments don't introduce this type of motion unless it's in their interests. And if it's in the government's interests, it's not in the opposition's interests. And if it's not in the opposition's interests, it's not in the public interests.

The role of the opposition in this chamber, in this Parliament, like in any other, is the most single important function that takes place in the parliamentary system. I believe that. It's called democracy. If you have but token opposition, if you have opposition that's marginalized, that's diminished in their effect or capacity, then you have an erosion of democracy, and that's not a good thing by anybody's measure, is it?

I've had occasion to note that in the series of majority governments that we've endured in this province, starting back in 1987, a whole lot of people get elected to the Legislature who wouldn't have been elected were it not for the sweep, and a whole lot of people get defeated who wouldn't have been defeated were it not for the sweep, and that in the course of sweeps, people get elected who have no business being here, and in the course of sweeps, people get defeated who are very important, effective members of the chamber, of all political stripes. It started happening in 1987.

The other phenomenon that happens when you have sweeps is that people get elected to this Parliament without ever having been in opposition. Their first parliamentary experience is one of power and one of clamouring for perks, prestige and yet more power, and I find that a distasteful thing. I find it unbecoming of people who in and of themselves are well-educated, intelligent, skilled, talented people with life experiences that enable them to bring some real value to this chamber.

Let's make this clear. These standing order changes will mean that there will be more debate hours per day, which will also mean that legislation will pass through this House more quickly, because the standing orders

also provide for an automatic, if you will, threshold for time allocation at the end of but six and a half hours of debate. That means only a handful of people have discussed, or contributed to the discussion of, a bill or a motion like this one.

I also want you to know that New Democrats, along with the Conservatives, made it very clear to the government that if question period could be maintained at 1 o'clock—because we believe that strongly in it—we will adopt, sign off on, vote for and support every other part of this standing order motion. We have no quarrel with coming here at nine. We have a quarrel with accelerating the passage of legislation so that it doesn't receive the scrutiny it deserves. But, having said that, we recognize it's the majority government that's hell-bent on doing that. We are prepared to accept all of that and collaborate, co-operate with the government in the context of those new rules. The government rejected that, in my view, considerable offer.

The government says, "Oh, well, what's the difference about what time question period takes place? What's the difference: 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock?" If there's no difference, then what's wrong with 1 o'clock? If it's the government's argument that it's six of one, half a dozen of the other, then let's go for one and get this whole business resolved and dealt with.

When I spoke to the motion itself, I had occasion to quote the member for St. Catharines, the current Minister of Transportation, whom I've known for a great deal of time and for whom I have a great deal of respect and regard. I quoted the comments he made in 1997, in response so the so-called Baird standing order changes. One of the things Mr. Bradley, the member for St. Catharines, the Minister of Transportation, said, and I quoted it last week from Hansard of that debate, was, "The government was risking creating a hostile environment, such that it would be impossible to obtain the unanimous consent for even the most modest of things."

We had some pretty hostile parliaments here over the course of the last 18 years. In the early 1990s, when the NDP held power, there was pretty hostile stuff going on: pretty heavy-handed approaches on the part of the government and some real resentment on the part of the opposition. The Liberals felt they'd been cheated out of a victory. They thought it was theirs simply to have. There was a great deal of resentment by the Liberals of the NDP having formed government. They had a hard time, if you will, adjusting to opposition. They still wanted to be the government.

Oh, my, when Mike Harris and the Conservatives sailed to victory in 1995, not only were there a whole lot of New Democrats shaking their heads, but there were a whole lot of Liberals shaking their heads twice as fast, because they assumed that they were now the natural party of power. And there was Mike Harris—remember Mike Harris and Dianne Cunningham? Andy Brandt was the leader. Mike Harris was from North Bay.

You know, a whole lot of folks in this Legislature thought that when Mike Harris entered that leadership race, Dianne Cunningham would just clean up. So the people were surprised, and some people were arrogant enough to be amused, when Mike Harris got elected as leader of the Conservative Party. Mike Harris isn't a guy who walks around with Ph.D. after his name or has high-falutin sort of approaches to things. When you talk about a member of this Legislature, a leader who acquired skills, who had a learning curve that was as steep as anybody's could be—because his leadership then resulted in his becoming Premier. The Liberals were fit to be tied. They didn't know whether they were drilled, punched or bored.

1630

When Mike Harris, again, improved as much as he did, went out there and sold his revolution to voters who had voted NDP, and who the Liberals arrogantly expected to vote for them—of course, we know what happened in 2003. We know what happened, which, again, more than a few Conservatives I'm sure found frustrating. But the message is this: The voters of Ontario have voted for all three political parties—all four, to be fair to the Green. No longer do voters or families of voters see themselves as the minority of voters who identify themselves as Liberal, Tory, NDP or Green. They vote every which way in every which riding.

So this is one thing I can say with certainty to some of the Liberal members of this Legislature: Some of you will end up in opposition benches. I don't know how many, and I'm not going to be arrogant enough to suggest when. Some of you, then, will have thrust upon you the responsibility of being in opposition. So if you think it's cute or somehow oh so clever to trim the wings of the opposition but a little more, wait and see.

I oppose this time allocation motion; never voted for one, ever. I recognize that governments of all political stripes have used them, but I also put this to you: If we're going to sit longer, if we're going to have more debate, as the Premier suggests we will pursuant to these standing orders, then why in the Lord's name would we need a time allocation motion? Why would we? The suggestion from Mr. McGuinty is that this government is all about encouraging debate, accommodating all those people who want to speak to a bill, a motion or any other matter. Then why is there a time allocation motion on the floor today?

Let's understand what a time allocation motion is: A time allocation motion is when the government uses its brute majority to terminate debate, notwithstanding how many members haven't had an opportunity to make a contribution to that discussion here in this chamber. It's not based on whether there's been a thorough discussion. It's not based on whether the public is satisfied that there has been adequate consideration. It's not based on whether or not the seriousness of the matter is one that should warrant it receiving, yes, indeed, sometimes ponderous and thoughtful consideration. It's based on the will of a government that wants to accelerate its agenda.

I imagine that in due course, there will be Liberals having to eat crow with respect to some of the things

they've said about the standing order motion, and even more so, this time allocation motion. I imagine that there will be some Liberal members who will truly regret not having stopped their Premier in his tracks.

Let's understand, this comes out of the Premier's office. Both the Conservatives and the New Democrats very clearly put to the government that the matter of standing order changes should be put to a tripartite committee, should involve the Clerk's office and should involve the Speaker; so that we can carefully study other jurisdictions, so that we can carefully study the needs of this chamber and so that we can proceed in a thoughtful and studied way. That didn't happen. Rather, the government wanted to ram stuff through—and it does it because it can, and it can because its backbenchers don't stand up to it because its backbenchers are too eager scanning the morning papers to see whether or not a cabinet position has opened as a result of the delinquencies of a cabinet minister the night before, in whatever way, shape or form. It's because the backbencher is obsessed with becoming a parliamentary assistant, a minister or some other servant of the Premier's office. It's because there are people outside of cabinet who are more capable than people inside of cabinet—and they know it—but they're prepared to embarrass themselves, to humiliate themselves, to grovel—

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Speaker: Again, I'm asking the member to abide by standing order 23(i), which is the imputing of false or unavowed motives to another—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank you for your point of order, but I didn't hear the member impugning any particular other member, so I'll ask him to wrap up his speech and give him another few seconds to do so.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, my small portion of time is up.

I regret that this government and its members prefer the jackboots to democracy. I tell you that I will vote against this motion with great pride.

Mr. David Zimmer: I want to speak to what we should be debating today, and that's the substance of the time allocation motion. The deputy House leader made the point in his opening remarks that, really, what we want to do is move along in amending the standing orders.

The previous speaker, at the end of his remarks, hit on the test that we should be bringing to time allocation motions, and that test is, has there been a thorough discussion of the issue at hand? Has there been adequate consideration? Have all of the issues been debated? Are they on the table? Does everybody understand them? In my submission, we've had plenty of time to do that. We've debated the standing orders amendment. Everybody knows what the issues are—the NDP, the Conservatives, the Liberals. It's now our obligation to bring ourselves to the point where we are going to vote on it.

Has there been enough debate? In my submission, there has been enough debate.

Let me turn to the history and facts that we should be considering when we're considering the matter of time allocation.

These are the facts. The amendment of the standing orders was tabled on April 16, so everybody had a chance to analyze the document, reflect on it and bring their judgment to bear on it. On April 21, five days later, it was formally moved in this Legislature. Again, everybody had a chance in that five-day period to think the thing through and formulate their questions. We then started debate right after the amendment was tabled, on April 21. We started the debate right after petitions. That's late in the afternoon, probably around 3:30 or 4 o'clock, and we continued until 6 p.m. We came back the next day, April 22, and again picked up right after petitions and continued until 6 p.m. We came back April 23 and again picked it up around 3:30 or 4 o'clock, right after petitions, and continued until 6 p.m. On April 28, we started to debate the time allocation motion at about 6:45, and we continued that to 9:30—an evening sitting on that topic. What's really interesting is that earlier that afternoon, there was a vote in this House as to whether we would sit in the evening to consider this business that we're now talking about today. The motion to sit in the evening was voted against by—guess who? The Conservatives and the NDP. We gave them the opportunity to come here in the evening and they said, "No, no; it's an evening. We don't work in the evenings. We're not coming here in the evenings." And they voted against it. Fortunately, those of us on the Liberal side of the House voted for it.

1640

We came here on the evening of the 28th, and I remember that evening because, rather than debate the issues at hand, the opposition party started this process of ringing the bells. I was here, prepared to speak to the substance of matters that evening, as were my colleagues, and we were prevented. We did not get an opportunity to speak because of this procedural technicality. The NDP and the Conservatives dragged us through it so that we couldn't debate the substance of it.

The NDP and the Conservatives are speaking with a forked tongue on this issue. Today, they stand up and they express outrage that they haven't had an opportunity to speak to the substance of this. Yet on the 28th, they voted against sitting in the evening so that we could have a discussion on the substance of it. They had their opportunity on the 21st, 22nd and the 23rd.

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: The language he is using I don't think is appropriate for this place.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: That language was used specifically in this House, with all due respect to the official opposition whip. "Forked tongue" has a specific dictionary meaning. It was used in this Legislature a week and a half ago. That was when Speaker Peters was sitting. It was not kept silent; it was clear and obvious. I'm submitting to you that it is not out of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the members for their remarks on this issue and remind all members to please be careful in terms of the language that they use in this House.

Mr. David Zimmer: In any event, after debate on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd, the opposition parties voted against an evening sitting to continue the debate on the evening of the 28th.

The opposition parties have had a substantial opportunity to speak to it, and in fact they have. Eight members of the official opposition spoke—that's a third of their caucus. Eight out of 26 members spoke, and seven out of the 10 NDP caucus members spoke. The Conservative member for Kitchener–Waterloo spoke. The Conservative member for Nepean–Carleton spoke. The NDP member for Hamilton Centre spoke. The Conservative member for Simcoe–Grey spoke. The NDP member for Welland spoke. The Conservative member for Niagara West–Glanbrook spoke. The NDP member for Timmins–James Bay spoke. The Conservative member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke spoke. The NDP member for Kenora–Rainy River spoke. The Conservative member for Wellington–Halton Hills spoke. The NDP member for Beaches–East York spoke. The Conservative member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills spoke. The NDP member for Parkdale–High Park spoke. The Conservative member for Oshawa spoke. My distinguished colleague sitting beside me here, the NDP member for Toronto–Danforth, spoke.

In addition to that, three Conservative members made lengthy members' statements to this issue: three statements on April 28—

Mr. Peter Kormos: David, 90 seconds is not lengthy. Correct yourself.

Mr. David Zimmer: Four opposition members raised questions in the Legislature: on April 28, April 24, April 22 and April 21. In fact, the debate thus far, and I have it in my hands here, has taken up approximately—I counted it. It's either 160 or 163 pages of Hansard. Here's Hansard; it's a couple of pounds of Hansard.

I come back to my point. The issue—and it's interesting that the member for Welland raised it, and that is, have we had adequate debate? Have we explored the issues? Has everybody had a chance to speak who wants to speak? The answer to that is yes. The Liberals understand the issues, clearly the NDP understand the issues and clearly the Conservatives understand the issues. We've had sufficient debate. There've been members' statements, there've been members' questions, there has been the debate that I've referred to, and there is the business of the government trying to have an evening sitting to further the discussion, and the opposition parties voted against it because they did not want to sit in the evenings.

Since I've been here—and that's since 2003—I can't remember an occasion when the opposition parties have not voted against a government motion to sit in the evening.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's not true. Correct yourself.

Mr. David Zimmer: I can't remember an occasion.

It's obvious that the two things we should be addressing in the time allocation motion have been satisfied. One: Has everybody had a fair chance to speak to the issues? Are the issues clearly on the table, if you will? In my submission, they are. That being the case, I urge everyone in this House to vote with the government on the time allocation motion.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to debate the time allocation motion which we're talking about this afternoon. Just for those folks out there watching this debate, time allocation is ending debate on the motion to do with changing the standing orders here at the Ontario Legislature.

Many people probably wonder what the standing orders are. Every member has this little grey book in their desk that is the standing orders. They are really the rules by which this place operates: the rules of debate; how many hours or days it takes to pass a particular piece of legislation; when the Legislature sits. One of the key things in terms of the changes being made right now is when question period will occur.

When the Premier reacted in the Legislature to questions about these changes to the standing orders, he put the following spin on it. He said that we're changing the time of the sitting of the Legislature to match more the workday of the average Ontario citizen. I would suggest that that is baloney; that's just spin, and there is an ulterior motive to the changes the government is putting forward.

I think the changes to the standing orders to do away with night sittings really originated from the member from Nepean–Carleton, who is a young mother and a member of this Legislature who wanted to form a committee to look at changing the Legislature to make it more family-friendly. So this Legislature passed a motion to set up an all-party committee to look at making the Legislature more family-friendly. I would ask the government what happened to that committee, because it has not met or done the business of looking at making this place more family-friendly. The government has just unilaterally brought about changes to the standing orders. They've been debated now, and the debate is being forced to an end by this time allocation motion. They're doing things they want to lessen the effect of the opposition and to make it easier for the government. The family-friendly committee has not met to discuss the business of this place.

The spin that the Premier has been putting on this, suggesting that when members are not in the Legislature they're not working, is shameful and an insult to the members of this Legislature. I can tell you that this coming Monday, had we not been meeting, I was planning on attending the Parry Sound municipal association meeting in Burk's Falls at 9 a.m. Unfortunately, because these new standing orders will be in place by then, the Legislature will be in session and I will miss that important meeting at Burk's Falls.

1650

Last Saturday, which is not atypical for me, I drove 600 kilometres around the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. I started out early in the morning and attended various meetings around the riding and arrived home after 11 p.m., and I know that's not uncommon for lots of members, particularly rural members, in this place. So the idea that we aren't working if we're not actually here is offensive to members, the great majority of whom work very hard.

Then the question becomes, what is this all about? What's the government's agenda?

The main thing we object to in the change in the standing orders is the time of question period. They're changing question period from being in the afternoon. The PC opposition has put forward an amendment that would change this proposal so that question period would be at 1 o'clock, at a set time every day, a time that allows more time for questions and allows the press more access to ministers. This government is switching question period to an earlier time of the day, to 10:45, and that makes it a lot more difficult for the opposition to prepare questions. It makes it less family-friendly for those members of staff who will now be getting up quite early to scan all the media and to start preparing questions, because there's a fair amount of lead time before question period.

I believe the government is moving question period to an earlier time so that the afternoon will basically be free for all the government ministers to not necessarily be around the Legislature, to be out making announcements and not be tied to the Legislature.

There is reduced accountability, without a doubt. Experts like Professor Graham White have given their opinion that question period, the time of the day in the Legislature that is most watched by the media, will have less focus when it's at 10:45 in the morning. There's been a letter from the press gallery here at Queen's Park suggesting that this move will lessen the accountability of this place. I think it's been fairly unanimously agreed, certainly by the opposition parties, that having question period at 10:45 in the morning will make this place less accountable.

There are other changes, but that's the single biggest change that we object to, because it makes it more difficult for the opposition and easier for the government. The ministers will be out around the province; they won't be seen around this place.

To pass a bill, instead of being sessional days, it's now going to be hours, and the effect will be that bills will pass much quicker. What's wrong with that? I'll tell you what's wrong with that. Often, it takes a while for the general public and interested groups to learn about a bill. Having the debate spread out over a few weeks is a good thing because the general public and interest groups who might be interested learn about it, and it gives them time to participate in legislative committees. I think of the bill that's before us right now, the speed limiters bill to limit trucks to 105 kilometres. I think if that passed in a couple of days, the independent truckers who might be opposed to it wouldn't even get an opportunity to learn about the bill, and all of a sudden it's the law. They wouldn't get an opportunity to speak amongst their members, to come before a committee to put their side of the situation forward, and to, hopefully, if the process is working, improve the bill. So that's another minor change that is being proposed.

Private members' bills are going to be debated on Thursday afternoon, and the time for private members' bills is reduced. It goes from an hour to 45 minutes. I think an hour is barely enough time, and that time is being reduced to 45 minutes. If you're going to reduce anything to 45 minutes, reduce question period to 45 minutes and get rid of those silly government questions where the question and answer are handed out before it starts. They're just a waste of time. I think that's how you could save 15 minutes.

The government House leader talked about and looked for a response from opposition parties about going to three weeks on, one week off. Certainly, the PC Party generally supports that, but that's not in these proposed new changes to the standing orders. That three weeks on, one week off, like the federal government, would be much better for rural members, in that we'd have a week every month to deal with rural issues.

There are many other points I'd like to make, but I know we have many members who would like to speak, so I'm going to wrap up and say that these changes are good for the government but bad for the opposition, and that is why we are voting against them and we'll be voting against this time allocation motion.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to add my voice to this debate, which has been taking place either on the motion to review the standing orders or on the time allocation motion. I will obviously be speaking to the time allocation motion, and I agree with all the comments which were made by the honourable member from Willowdale in that we should move ahead. We should move on from this debate and try out these new rules which are being proposed.

I have been intently listening to the debate which has been taking place this afternoon and on previous days. There have been valid points which have been raised from all sides, no doubt. However, my point of view, as a newer member in this chamber, is that I don't think we should be scared of some changes in the rules. I think we should embrace change and we should try it. It is a trial, and there is nothing wrong with trying the new hours to see how that works out. If that results in creating an efficient working place for all the members of this House, then great; we achieved something good. If not, then we can revisit those rules after the spring and see how they can be improved.

As a new member, I have to admit that I was kind of taken aback by the way the hours have been set up. We start at 1:30 in the afternoon with the routine proceedings, we work until about 6 o'clock, and then we start again most evenings, 6:45 to 9:30. As somebody who has been in private practice, practising law for many years,

and is used to starting work really early in the morning—and I'm not insinuating that we members don't work long hours. I think it is a 24/7 job, in essence. But in terms of getting substantive office work done, all of us in our previous life have the experience of getting things done early in the morning.

I don't see why in this instance, when we are in Toronto at Queen's Park, when we are sitting here as legislators, not in the assembly, we don't start early here as well, 9 o'clock in the morning, and get things done. I think that's definitely modernizing the way this chamber works, and we can really achieve things.

I think a lot of us newer members started discussing those issues, and I'm very proud that this government has taken on this issue and is trying to redefine the hours. Like I said earlier, let's try them on a trial basis and see how they work out. Perhaps we will have some positive change in this place. Change is not a bad thing.

I can imagine that some members who have been members for a long time might be a little concerned because they are used to a certain way of getting things done in this particular place. But I think for the benefit of us all, and for the benefit of attracting new talent out there, encouraging others from all walks of life to consider a role in public life, it might not be a bad idea to have new hours, hours which are more reflective of modern life, where we start at 9 o'clock in the morning and we end our day by 6 o'clock.

Given the nature of the technology, I'm a bit puzzled as to why moving question period to 10:45 in the morning is going to create such a big concern. We live in a sort of real-time zone, where we've got BlackBerries and Internet, where it's much easier for us to formulate our views, to formulate our questions and to get the right information in order to pose a question to the government. Once again, to hold to the fact that somehow moving question period from the afternoon to the morning is an attack on democracy—I'm unable to understand the link between the two. Once again, let's try. We should not be too scared.

1700

I admit, I'm a newer member. I have only been elected for seven months and I don't know the ins and outs. But I'm also willing to try things out. Just because things have been working in a particular way for centuries, that is not a valid argument that somehow changing them in a particular manner is going to be an attack on democracy. We will still have an accountability session. We still have a mechanism where the opposition can pose questions to the government side and the government has to respond to those questions, not only in this chamber but outside this chamber. There are, as we know, other different agents available too, through media and our constituents, who will always make us beholden to our point of view and ensure that we remain accountable to their views.

I undertook an unscientific poll on this issue as I was talking to people in my riding of Ottawa Centre. I asked them, "We are about to change these rules. There is a lot of discussion taking place. What do you think about that?"

I represent Ottawa Centre, a riding which has the House of Commons right within its boundaries, where people are really in tune with politics. They follow politics all the time, federal and provincial, because that's just the nature of the riding. There are a lot of public servants and people who work in the House of Commons.

First of all, most of the people were not even aware that this debate is taking place. Second, when I explained to them what kinds of changes we're proposing, they were a bit surprised that this debate is even going on. The reaction I was getting from my constituents was, "Go ahead. Try it. It's not a bad idea. We're sending you to Toronto, to Queen's Park, to work. We don't understand why you start working at 1:30. Otherwise, we'd rather you were here in Ottawa, serving the constituents." I'd rather be in Ottawa as well, serving the constituents.

I think starting at 9 in the morning and finishing at 6, so we can all go back to the office and make those phone calls, get things done on behalf of our constituents, is a good idea. It will enhance the efficiency of this Legislature in making sure that we get things done. It is a step towards modernization. We should not be afraid of choosing change. Remember, the people of Ontario chose change in 2003 and they're very glad about it. They chose change then and they've affirmed that in this past election. Once again, I think it's a logical thing to say that if it does not work out, we'll review it. I think we'll all consult again.

I very much appreciate all the debate that has taken place on this issue. In listening to some of the debates just today, it's very clear in my mind that we've exhausted this issue and that we should move on with this time allocation motion so that we can implement the changes, try them out and hope we have created a more efficient, more friendly workplace which is reflective of all our values and all the collective good that we are trying to achieve on behalf of the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Before I call for further debate, can I just remind the members to try to keep the side conversations to a little lower pitch? It's becoming difficult for me to hear the members' speeches.

Mr. John Yakabuski: If the members pay attention, everyone will have no trouble hearing what I have to say, whether they want to or not.

What this whole debate today is essentially about is the time allocation motion. What I find really peculiar and puzzling is that this government has become so determined to use time allocation that they will even use it on a motion to change the standing orders. It's an example of what lengths they will go to to show how powerful they are and how weak the opposition is. They love to take those opportunities to point out that they have absolute power in this Legislature. And that's a fact: They have the majority and they can exercise it in the way that they choose.

But the best way democracy is served is to allow the opposition to have their say and to have their day. The people need a strong opposition. What is happening with the way that this government—I wasn't here, but I will concede that governments in the past have done similar things. I'm not saying exactly this thing, because this is unique, but it's always been the way of government to try to bring in changes to weaken the opposition collectively. I'm not suggesting that they do things to weaken the ability of individual members to be effective, because I don't believe they do that.

I must say that I try to work as closely as I can with ministries and ministers of the crown here in this Legislature. But collectively they do everything they can to weaken the opposition. That practice has purely partisan purposes: In order to strengthen them, as they hope they can win re-election. If they can make opposition less relevant, that will, in part, accomplish their goals.

It scares me, because this Premier, when he came to office, promised that he would make the role of the individual member more relevant. He would make the job of being an MPP something that mattered more, on an individual and a collective basis, to the people of Ontario and indeed to this Legislature. But what has happened is that more than ever before, more than any other Premier in history, power has been concentrated in Premier McGuinty's office.

The largest staff in the history of Ontario is in the Premier's office now. Seventy-two people are working in the Premier's office. The largest staff in either the Mike Harris premiership or the Ernie Eves premiership was 44. So the numbers tell a story: the largest staff in the Premier's office in the history of Ontario. That's a fact. That tells you where the power is concentrated in this Legislature.

I don't say this in any way to demean the individual MPPs, but the government MPPs have no freedom. We at least have the opportunity within our caucus to speak when our constituents need us to speak on their behalf. In the Liberal caucus, in the government caucus, that is totally controlled by Dalton McGuinty and those 72 people in his office. There is nothing, there is not a question asked, that is not approved by his office. There is not an answer given that isn't approved by his office. It is spin and messaging every minute of every question period.

Let's talk about that question period. I heard the member for Ottawa Centre speak about being a new member and how he couldn't understand why we had a problem with question period being at 10:45. We've all agreed that we have no problem with when the day starts and when it ends. But he couldn't understand why we want question period at 1 o'clock as opposed to 10:45.

I guess my submission to him and to every other member of the governing party would be: If it doesn't matter, why would we change something that is working quite well? The timing of question period is not the problem with question period. It is the fact that the government never answers questions in question period that is the problem with question period. It is not the time of day. We could still have question period at 1 o'clock in the afternoon as a set time, not to vary because of ministerial statements or any of that kind of stuff—as a set time, 1 o'clock. Boom, 1 to 2 is question period.

We'd even be willing to shorten it. We'd even be willing to shorten it from 1 o'clock to 1:45. But as a trade-off, you'd have to take out those four government-planted fluffy questions every day. You couldn't have those. You couldn't allow ministers to stand up, beat their chests or talk about what a great job they're doing and applaud the individual member who asked the question. You wouldn't be allowed to do that. You'd have to give up that 16 minutes. But we'd be willing to do that. So if you want to make question period a little bit shorter, a little more tight, a little more snappy, we're quite prepared to do that.

We don't have a problem with the timing of the start of the day or the end of the day. Our question was, why do you need to move that question period to 10:45? We've already been through that part of the debate.

I want to talk about—which just proves what kind of lengths the government will go to to let us know, over and over again, just how powerful they are and how serious they are about using that power.

1710

We get these proposed changes to the committee structure today, because, you see, you can't change the standing orders, Madam Speaker, as you know, and the question period and the orders of the day and all of that kind of stuff—and I know the people out there in TV land are wondering, "What is he talking about?" I accept that they don't really care, but they do care that we're working. Do you know what else they care about? They care that opposition is given the opportunity to be effective. If they can't be effective, given the opportunity, that's the opposition's problem. But it is a responsibility of the government to ensure that they give opposition the opportunity to be effective. Other than that, you don't have a democracy; you have totalitarianism. That's what you've got. You've got a dictatorship, thank you very much.

We don't want to have that here in Ontario. So the people out there want us to be mindful of our responsibility as opposition, and they want the government to be respectful of the need of opposition to play its role.

We got these proposed—this is not a prop, Madam Speaker, it's an official document of this Legislature—changes to the committee structure. Do you know what we were told? Do you know what we were told—again, talking about the absolute power. What is that saying? Absolute power—no, I can't say that, can I? I can't say what I was about to say. No, because the member from Mississauga–Streetsville would have been up like a shot.

Anyway, about the absolute power: Do you know what we were told? "You have two choices: You give unanimous consent to these committee changes or you'll lose question period on Thursday."

Now, can you imagine that? Can you imagine that, to those people in the province of Ontario who rely on the fact that this is the one hour of a day that we have the opportunity to hold the government to account, to hold their feet to the fire and to ask them why they are doing this about that, or why they are not doing that about this? That's the only opportunity.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That was profound.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I'll tell you, I've heard some pretty profound things coming from that side of the House, certainly on this debate.

So this was what we were presented with: an ultimatum. The proverbial gun to the head: "You do this, or you'll lose question period."

Is that—the rhetorical question—respecting democracy, when you tell Her Majesty's loyal opposition, "You're going to do this, or you're not going to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the 12 million to 13 million Ontarians out there; you will not have the opportunity to question the government as to what they're doing"? I submit that that's not democracy.

I listened with great interest—you'll have to keep an eye on that clock for me, member for York–Simcoe, and let me know when I've had enough—

Interjection: When we've had enough.

Mr. John Yakabuski: When you've had enough.

I listened to the member for Welland quite intently when he talked about bygone eras and how different it was. As he alluded to, my father was a member of this Legislature in those halcyon days, as they say, when things were quite different.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I know a few other stories too.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know that too. I know quite a few of them too, and most of those would be ruled unparliamentary just for talking about them.

But it was a different Legislature, and he's absolutely right that the expectations on us, as members of this Legislature, are much greater today because of the fact that there is a focus on it; the proceedings of the Legislature are reported on daily. The people out there in the ridings throughout the province of Ontario want to know and be kept on top and abreast of what things are actually going on here. So this is clearly a very important debate.

I know the government kind of scoffs at it. They say: "Oh, what's the big deal? Let's give it a try, and if it's not working, we'll consider changes."

Mrs. Julia Munro: Okay, it's time.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My colleague from York–Simcoe has said: "Enough. I've heard enough from you." Actually, I must say that the government people have been rather polite today. They must have caucused this and said, "We're just not going to pay attention to them anymore."

So I do urge this government to be mindful of their responsibility, to be mindful of the responsibility that power carries with it. You have total power in this Legislature. We can't stop you from doing anything. We can only point out to you when we believe that what you want to do is wrong. You know that when we believe what you are doing is right, we support you on those things, and we try to give you that support as often as we can. So we ask for your support to let democracy rule the day. Let democracy be king today in Ontario.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I am delighted to rise today, particularly after my good friend, and add my comments to this debate. I just want to talk about the things that he has raised. They say that when his dad was here, and some other members, the debate used to be a true debate. One would say something, and then the next person would actually comment on that. I know we've lost that art here and I know many of us are trying to bring that back. So I think it's great that we are having this debate today.

I say to the members, particularly to some of our newer members, that if you happen to sit on the government side and you look across—and all the kids who come to this place learn this, of course. If we look across, what do we see? We see an owl. There's an owl carved on the arch up there, and that is to remind the government that our job is to be wise. If you are sitting in the opposition and you look across, what we have is the eagle. The eagle is to remind the opposition that they are to be eagle-eyed and to hold the government to account. It's one of the hallmarks of democracy. So I'm glad to join into this debate.

My good friend from Barry's Bay—can we say that here? Yes, I think we can. My good friend from Barry's Bay says he feels that somehow what we're talking about today will weaken the opposition. Last time I checked I didn't think—I would never want to say on paper or in Hansard that somehow the opposition is weak, or could be weakened. I think it would be an insult to them to say that somehow we think either that they were weak or could be weakened by this. I don't think that's the case at all.

I do have a bit of a memory. I do remember that party saying that they thought the budget—the hallmark of the central document that is always presented in front of the people in this place—that a budget of this province should not be presented in this place, and should be presented over at a car parts factory. I remember that.

I remember there were questions raised by our party and by the New Democratic Party and by almost every editorial board in this province—

Hon. David Caplan: Nineteen straight days in the Globe and Mail.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Nineteen straight days, the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal reminds me—saying that they thought that was an affront to democracy. So I take with a grain of salt the question about whether or not this is an affront to democracy.

I actually think, as the Minister of Research and Innovation, that it is important for us to understand that we are in the new millennium, the 21st century. We have to embrace change. People expect us to operate at the speed of the life of our constituents, and they lead a just-in-time life. I think it's reasonable for us to say that we should look at modernizing this. I think it's important for

the government, because it does fall upon us, the mandate given to us by the people that we are to lead. So it's appropriate that we are taking these steps today.

I think there are many important issues facing the province of Ontario. I don't consider this to be one where we should take away any more time or focus from those great issues facing our province and where we are in regard to social cohesion and economic development, and spend any more time on this issue. But it is something we are doing.

My good friend from Barry's Bay was saying that somehow he felt this was taking away the ability of the private members. I've looked at this proposal, and the one thing I knew as a private member, before I happened to be called to cabinet, was the fact that one could introduce a private member's bill. I was very fortunate—I know it's somewhat rare—to actually have a private member's bill that was able to gain complete and unanimous consent, which is really a requirement to get a private member's bill.

You could sit here for an entire mandate and perhaps have one opportunity to have one bill actually debated during private members' bills. So our proposal actually will increase that by some 50%. It means that a private member will have the ability to take those bills and get them on the floor for debate—whether it's a resolution or a bill.

1720

I don't agree with the assertion of the member opposite that somehow this is going to weaken the ability of an opposition member, or any member who's not in cabinet, to actually have the attention of the people of Ontario, to record through debate in Hansard an important issue that is theirs that they bring before this House as a private member in regard to private members' bills.

I thought it was really interesting that the member from Barry's Bay would actually say, "Explain to us in great detail about what happens in the government caucus." As a matter of fact, I think he was very clear about that. Last time I checked on our democracy in our caucus—and I'm sure Madam Speaker's would be the same—we're just assuming that the things we're talking about in caucus are in camera, that those things are not being—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh sure, for maybe 30 seconds.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I know the member from Niagara-left-of-centre thinks that somehow this is a little bit different, but for me, we assume that our caucus is sacrosanct. So I find it interesting: I have this vision of the member from Barry's Bay with his ear to the door, that he seems to know what's going on within the government caucus, and I'd say to the member from Niagara that maybe he has his ear on the other door because he seems to have an idea of what's going on.

I don't want to break any caucus solidarity, but I can assure you that in our caucus meetings the discussions that we have are fulsome, and we bring to the government, as a member of the government caucus, the concerns of our riding and our constituents. We do a wonderful job. I look at my caucus mates and I can assure you that they, each and every one of them, stick up for their ridings and talk about the things that are important to them. It is the hallmark of our parliamentary democracy that we have that, but if people ever had an opportunity to listen to the quality, the passion and the vision of the kinds of debates that happen within our caucuses—now, the one thing I know is that in our caucus, our leader, the Premier, actually goes to that caucus. He doesn't have to get a little pass from somebody to actually get in the building and go to the caucus.

I know the members opposite may have a little bit—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —soup, from Campbell's.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I hear Chicken Little over there going on about something. Well, he is talking about our friend.

I would say that I believe we have an opportunity at our weekly caucus meeting to speak directly to our leader, who happens to be, because of the people, the Premier of the day.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You're losing people.

Hon. John Wilkinson: That's amazing.

The question here is—I know the member has just gone on about the timing of question period, the time of the day. I think initially they didn't want that, but then they kind of moderated a bit, particularly after all the papers in this province said, "Are you actually going to try to explain to people that you don't want to be here from 9 to 6?" How unreasonable is that? I think it then kind of morphed into this other issue about, when is question period?

As a minister of the crown, I know I'm available to the press. The fact that they don't want to speak to me is completely up to them, but I am available. We make our ministers available to the press. They know where we are, and there are plenty of opportunities.

Whether or not 10:45 is a bit early in the morning for you—I can understand that. I can tell you that my good friend Dave Murray, with the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, is milking his cows I think at 4 in the morning.

Interjection: You're milking this speech.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm waiting for my parliamentary assistant to take over from me. He'll let me know when I've dried up.

I was just saying that he's up at 4 o'clock in the morning and he has come to visit. How appropriate—a great constituent of mine. Let the record show that Dave Murray from my riding was here. But he is up at 4 o'clock in the morning.

I find it difficult as well—and I took some offence at this. In this mandate I happen to be a minister, but I was a loyal member of our caucus in our first mandate and I got to ask questions of ministers in the House. Now, the member opposite from Barry's Bay somehow says that that question or those questions are fluffy, and I disagree with that. I have a right, sir, and I believe our caucus has a right, to ask questions in question period. I look at the question period, for example, in the mother Parliament—

Interjection.

Hon. John Wilkinson: "Fluffy" is in the eye of the beholder, is what I would say. I look at the question period in the mother Parliament; it's on television and I notice that the members of the government ask questions of their own government. I think that is—

Interjections.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm more than happy to debate. At least he is heckling me from his seat, and I give him all due credit for that. I think it is important for members of the government to be able to ask questions on behalf of their constituents. I know that the member from Eglinton–Lawrence just asked me a question today about a constituent of his whom he is very proud of and whom we should all be very proud of.

When it comes right down to it, the question here is that the power that's being exercised has come from the people. The people have decided on this matter as to the seating arrangement here. They had an election. They decided on the seating arrangement. It wasn't up to us. All of us had only 107 votes. There were millions cast. Those of us who sit in these seats all had but one vote. Those people decided the arrangements in this House.

It has fallen to the government to look at modernizing this place. So what we've said is that we're going to try this out—I know it's a radical concept for some. We're going to try this out; we're going to refer this to a standing committee of the Legislature to look at over the summer. So bear with us when we try this out; it could be, I'd say to the whip, not more than eight weeks that we would try this out, perhaps a little shorter. And then we'll refer this matter and I think we'll have a fulsome debate as to whether or not this is a newer system. So I would say, don't—I know some people fear change. I would suggest that yes, you should embrace change.

I'll say just in closing: It reminds me, when I first got elected, that I had a mother call me. The local school board had changed the boundaries and her daughter had to go to a different school. She was very, very unhappy about that. I remember she was deeply disturbed and she had talked to her daughter and really characterized this as a negative thing, this change. I remember the director of the school board called this lady and said, "Listen, can you just do me a favour? Just let your daughter try it for a week. Just go to the other school for a week. Just try it for a week and then see." I can tell you that they actually tried the school—which had a beautiful renovation made—and the daughter was happy being there. We didn't know whether that was going to happen, but I thought it was wise of the director of education to say to her, "Just try it and we'll see whether or not we like it." I think that is an eminently defensible position on behalf of the government, and I look forward to further debate.

I'm glad the member from Barry's Bay is done now. I was looking forward to further debate and I know that the good member for Mississauga–Streetsville is itching to go. We look forward to bringing this matter to a conclusion so we can debate much more important issues of the day.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm actually very pleased with the opportunity to speak at this particular time on this motion. The last couple of government speakers have harped on the idea that somehow these changes are things that we should embrace, that we shouldn't be people unwilling to make change.

I come to this discussion from an entirely different point of view. I believe that these aren't real changes. They're not substantive and we are missing an opportunity. It's not from the fear of change, as the government members would like to characterize it. It's that you are looking at changing the order of the day. I find it very difficult to see this as more than some kind of manipulation.

In fact, earlier in the week, I made reference in a statement to the fact that we would become one of the very few—in fact, at the risk of leaving somebody out, almost every other parliamentary democracy, every Legislature, in Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand has question period in the afternoon.

1730

This has nothing to do with our reluctance to come to work. I find it very interesting that there's some kind of idea that is floated out by the government that somehow we're not wanting change, that we're unable to accept change. The question is that people are, in all of these other Legislatures, cognizant of the fact that an afternoon opportunity provides the media and the public with an opportunity to be more engaged. People are not as engaged earlier in the day. When they come home, often in the evening, as obviously not everyone but the majority of people do, this is the opportunity when they can take advantage of the media and actually learn what's going on. One of the issues, then, for us is the fact that you are making that opportunity far more reduced, the opportunity to have the media and to engage people.

I spoke at the very beginning about the fact that these aren't substantive. A number of government members have referred to the fact that after trying this, there's going to be an all-party opportunity to review it. Well, I would say that's putting the cart before the horse; that we should in fact be having that kind of discussion before we debate these kinds of changes.

I offer for your consideration the fact that in the third session of the 37th Parliament, we did look at the question of enhancing the role of the private member, of being able to look at what kinds of change we could contemplate. Guess what? This was an all-party committee, and it did look at some of these things. It made specific suggestions and recommendations, such things as allowing bills to be referred to committee after first reading, which would then allow much better discussion on the merits of proposed legislation as opposed to having the opportunity, as we do now, to look at a fait accompli that the government has created. Another recommendation was the creation of select committees which would then develop expertise and be able to look at very specific areas of legislation.

In the few moments that I have left, I would just like to look at the concluding remarks that were made in this committee's report. It says that throughout its deliberations, the committee has been cognizant that enhancing the role of private members is not an end unto itself but is rather a means for private members to more effectively represent their constituents and the people of Ontario, to scrutinize legislation, to hold the government to account, and ultimately to vindicate parliamentary democracy.

This is why we are here, and this is why we object to this kind of superficial change that will in fact reduce the opportunity for the public to understand what's happening in this House.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a privilege to join in this debate, and I just want to call to mind some of the people who have been discussing these changes in the standing orders. These are colleagues, albeit across the floor: the member from Welland, who has been here since 1987, 21 years, and the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, who has been here since 1981—people with a great deal of experience in the House in government and in opposition, and actually in the third party as well.

I was elected in 2003, so this is my fifth year, second term: enough time, I think, to get to understand the rhythms and the flows of the House—perhaps not too much time such that I can hearken back to whatever the era was in the past, be it the 1990s, 1980s, 1970s or before.

I'm looking at these proposals here, and I'd like to just go over some of the objections that some members, whose ability I truly do respect as members, have raised and give them my perspective from my five years here, along with some of the perspectives I may have gained in industry.

One of the things that my colleagues have asked about is the movement of question period from approximately 2 o'clock in the afternoon to 10:45 in the morning. On the one hand, you say that this is an Internet age; news in this age is now an around-the-clock exercise. That's changed over the years. Three stakeholders come to mind for me. One, of course, is the opposition, another is the media, and the third is the government.

Looking at it from the opposition standpoint, you have to ask if the questions are reactive or proactive. Does that mean that question period is driven by what happens in the newspaper that day, that hour, that morning, or is the philosophy of question period some coherent long-term strategy to hold the government to account? As a government, we will work best when held properly to account. It is not in the government's interest to have a toothless opposition question period. Does it make a difference, then, if the question period is at 10:45 or at 2 o'clock?

From the vantage point of the news media, most news events outside of this legislative precinct are held early to midday. From the perspective of the news media, some have said, "I'm willing to try it"; others have said, "I prefer it in the afternoon." As it is now, the media have to attend question period, do their scrum, and immediately file their stories. The time for the media to think it through, to get other reaction, to do some analysis simply isn't there at present. Might it be there at 10:45, when a minister has come in, given his question period, and the media has had a chance to attend that, scrum the minister, and then perhaps do some supplementary research? This is what we're going to find out. From the vantage point of the media, they get more time to prep for question period.

From the vantage point of the government, the ministers now have less time to prep, less time to research, less time to rehearse, and, I guess by definition, it will be a little bit more spontaneous, perhaps a little unrehearsed. It may well be that an early-morning question period may be the bane of the ministers' existence. This, we're going to find out.

The point of it all is that it strikes me as a bit of a trade-off both ways. It may not be as good. It may be that all the stakeholders to the question period proposal say they prefer it the way it was. It may be that nobody likes it. But that then gives us the flexibility to change it or to change it back. What this proposal is saying is, let's give it a try.

After this motion is dealt with, the issue will be moved to a committee, and, I'm going to speculate, because it's under the mandate of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, very likely the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. It is chaired by a member of the government and it's got some of the better members—more experienced and seasoned members—of the government, the opposition and the third party. These are people who are going to have a chance to assess these proposals in the light of several weeks of experience and determine whether or not they were effective. At that point, they can debate the effectiveness with the benefit of saying, "Well, when we actually did it in the House, this is how it worked."

The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills raised a number of points that I'd like to discuss. On April 28, he gave a very enlightening, very knowledgeable presentation. He asked, "Is the length of question period appropriate?" There is no proposal at the moment to change question period. He said that it's 45 minutes in the House of Commons. He raised the question of whether government members should ask questions. Maybe we can consider that as well in the light of our experience with question period at a new time.

Having attended a number of sessions in which I met members from other provincial Legislatures, one of the things that struck me is that we have supplementaries. For example, the leadoff questions will give the Leader of the Opposition two questions, followed in each case by two supplementaries; in essence, a discussion on what is intended to be pretty much the same topic.

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That doesn't happen in all provinces. In other provinces, a question is a question is a question. Should we treat questions as separate, stand-alone items? I think that's also a subject that the standing committee, presuming it's the Legislative Assembly committee, should

have a chance to look at. I personally think the discussion in that committee is going to be informed. I know it to be frank. I think it's going to have proper regard to how to make the people's Legislature in Ontario work better, for our province and our people.

I don't think there's anyone here, regardless of whether they're on the government or the opposition side, who wants our Legislature to be ineffective. If times change, why shouldn't we? I think we should empower this committee with the benefit of a few weeks of experience. I think we should give the eight very capable people on whichever committee will review it some experience to work in the next few weeks and deal with it from the vantage point of some substance.

I'd like to discuss in my final few minutes a few other things that have been proposed and will be implemented on a trial basis as we change the standing orders. One is the morning sittings. As a GTA member right now, I have Monday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings in which I don't have to be down here, except for committee duty, on a regular basis. At the moment, I have to give up those things. I have to give up the chance to do site visits, school visits and whatnot, to be down here. It's not true that if you're not down here, you're not working, as member after member has said. But this, for me, is going to take some of those site visits and school visits and shift them from a Monday morning, a Wednesday morning or a Thursday morning to another time, be it Friday or—there's been a proposal, I understand, that we'll be three weeks on and one week off. That would allow me to do more of my constituency work during that week.

The second question has to do with night sittings. Do I gain my nights? If I leave here at 5:45—again, speaking as a GTA member—I can be back in the riding at about 7:15. Maybe I can attend one function. It can be said that I would gain my nights. On the other hand, I had no major objections with night sittings. I found them useful to get to know the people that I have the privilege to serve with, to understand what kind of people they are. Also, in that 6:45 to 9:30 slot, we actually did have some informed debates in which the tone of the debate wasn't coloured by daytime, by its proximity to question period. One can say, "Well, is the 6:45 to 9:30 debate relevant?" But I could ask the same thing: What about the 9 o'clock debate? Will that be relevant? That too we're going to find out with the benefit of experience.

The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills raised an issue that I think is a very valid one about private members' time. By shifting it from Thursday morning to Thursday afternoon, one asks then, will quorum be an issue? I think that's something we have to think through. Private members' time is an important time in the Legislature. The member raises a very valid point about the difficulty of keeping quorum in the House after the government business is done. I think that's one that, with the benefit of a few weeks of experience, we're going to be able to pronounce an informed judgment on.

Even though we're going to debate three private members' bills or resolutions rather than two, a question I'd like to raise is, should members then be able to introduce more than one resolution or one bill in any one cycle? As it is now, about once every year and a half, you're going to have your one hour in private members' time. Should we go one step further and say that a member may raise more than one issue? How would we make that work? That might be another thing we can do to make private members' time more relevant for those of us who are indeed private members.

Be they Robert's Rules of Order or Marlowe and Montpetit or our own standing orders, or whatever is derived from these and from the customs and the practices and the traditions of the Ontario Legislature, the intent of our rules is to regulate the process of government, to prevent either the tyranny of the majority or the tyranny of the minority.

The member for Welland has been here for 21 years. He's been in government, opposition and the third party. He spoke very interestingly a few moments ago, and he points out accurately that we should be making these rules and their changes for times that transcend our careers, this government, this Parliament and any that will fall from it.

I think, personally, that we should take advantage of this time in between now and when the House rises in the summer to try them out, and if they don't work, refer them to the committee, go before the committee and make sure that when we make these changes, we are indeed bringing forth a more effective, a more democratic and a more responsive set of standing orders to enable the Ontario Legislative Assembly to take Ontario forward to the kind of province that we want Ontario to be.

Mr. John O'Toole: I know that we're actually debating a time allocation motion and winding up the debate on standing orders. All the members here know that this debate is a good example of the futility of the debate itself. It's the government's intention to move these orders starting next Monday. So all of the debate the people of Ontario might be listening to—indeed, even the members contributing today realize the futility. If you hearken back to the time and place when Premier McGuinty stood for something quite different during an election time, which was more accountability, openness and transparency, it's anything but. In fact, I see a gradual deterioration since McGuinty has taken over.

If you look at third party commentary, whether it's the press gallery—and their board has written to the Premier very upset with these changes. If you've listened to professor Graham White, an academic who is qualified to speak on these topics from a legislative point of view as well as a research perspective, he says this is really confronting the House with the perplexing problem of putting question period in the morning session.

No one on either side—no member I've heard—is opposed to changing the time when certain procedural things take place. By that, I mean, we're here. For instance, I was here this morning, as most members were. I

had a meeting with the Speaker and an all-party committee meeting looking at the Chief Electoral Officer's position. Every day there are committee meetings. In fact, if you look at how this rolls out, you will find that there's a lot of conflict with the committees, there's conflict with staff and many changes that I think they should have taken a bit more time with and not just rammed through. This is time allocated.

We moved a very significant and very reasonable amendment. That amendment would have scheduled question period at 1 o'clock each day, which would have been a fine compromise and, I would say, a goodwill gesture by the Premier and your House leader. It would have been the appropriate thing to do. But what they've done now is they've made life more difficult. In my case—not that it's impossible—for me to be here for 9 o'clock in the morning every day—I could have an apartment; I don't—I've got to start my trip at 6. I have no problem with that, not at all. But my point is that these changes aren't just me, there are other people involved: the staff, the preparation by the House leader's office, the strategists within each caucus to prepare for question period.

I just don't think at this time, listening to the input from the press gallery, listening to the academic input and to the experienced leaders in our own caucus—certainly, the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Norm Sterling, has served as House leader and in many positions over his illustrious career here. Our current House leader, Elizabeth Witmer, from Kitchener–Waterloo, has tried to make reasoned arguments, but your House leader, Michael Bryant, has refused to listen. Dalton McGuinty is acting arbitrarily, and I think rather thoughtlessly, to reach any kind of consensus, to barge ahead and change the orders and everything that's been a tradition in this place for many years.

If you look at other provinces—and I've been to almost every provincial Legislature as well as Westminster, and they do have, in almost every case, question period in the afternoon. Maybe it's tradition; maybe it's because that's the 6 o'clock-news question period, but that's been the tradition. I ask the question to at least give us some reasoned explanation.

The member from York–Simcoe, in her previous remarks, spoke about the Legislative Assembly committee that reviewed this to bring innovation into the Legislature. There's nothing innovative here. It's force-feeding to give ministers the time in the afternoon to do their political spin. That's what it's about. I hate to unravel any secrecy for the backbenchers, who have had no input on this whatsoever; none whatsoever. Despite their sincerity, they are being told how to vote, when to vote and what to say, and that's a demonstration of the leadership and accountability and the open democracy of Dalton McGuinty. There has been no input; your House leader has not listened.

The arguments and reasoned amendments have been put forward, and what are they doing? They're forcing this to happen on Monday, and there's still going to be a review. We'll see at the review time if there's any attempt to listen to any of the input from anyone across the province, whether it's academic or whether it's people who have a better experience or a better voice.

With that, I can tell you that this party will not be supporting it. It has been the process more than the outcome. We're not opposed to sitting longer, from 9 o'clock in the morning till 6 o'clock at night. That's not the issue. The issue here is the method and the fact that they're changing question period until—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. The time for debate has ended. It is now time for the first question to be put.

Mr. Caplan has moved that the motion be amended by striking the word "motion" in the fourth line and substituting "main motion." Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1752 to 1802.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): All those in favour, please rise and be identified by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	Milloy, John
Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Orazietti, David
Best, Margarett	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): All those opposed, please rise and be recorded by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Savoline, Joyce
Barrett, Toby	Martiniuk, Gerry	Scott, Laurie
Hudak, Tim	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Jones, Sylvia	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Kormos, Peter	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 45; the nays are 15.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The next question to be decided is government notice of motion 80, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Same vote? All agreed? Thank you.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 45; the nays are 15.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): It being after 6 of the clock, I declare this House adjourned until tomorrow, May 1, at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1806.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Balkissoon, Bas (L)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Broten, Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, government House leader / ministre des Affaires autochtones, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (L)	Barrie	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for seniors / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
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Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (L)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
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Gélinas, France (ND)	Nickel Belt	
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (L)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
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McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Miller, Paul (ND)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
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Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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Hon. Sandra Pupatello 1514
Child care
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Government
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Thursday 1 May 2008

Jeudi 1er mai 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 1 May 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 1er mai 2008

The House met at 1000.
Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT ACT (ASSISTANCE TO MUNICIPALITIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DES VOIES PUBLIQUES ET DES TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN (AIDE AUX MUNICIPALITÉS)

Mr. Yakabuski moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 38, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to the assistance that the Minister provides to municipalities / Projet de loi 38, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun à l'égard de l'aide apportée aux municipalités par le ministre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member has up to 10 minutes for debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to introduce—I should say reintroduce—Bill 38, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act, for the third time to this Legislature. This act, if passed, would essentially compel the Ministry of Transportation to share the provincial gas tax rebate with all municipalities, not simply those that have a public transportation system.

I believe, and people in rural Ontario believe, that this is a fundamental issue of fairness. They ask, "How can gas tax be collected from everyone but only given to those who have a public transportation system?" It has even become more discriminatory recently with the price of gas here in Ontario.

If you look at the logic, someone who lives in rural Ontario has little choice on most occasions, even to go out for a quart of milk, but to get into a vehicle and drive to that store to pick up that product. They don't have the option of getting on a bus or on the TTC, even if it isn't on strike. They don't have that option. In fact, in rural Ontario—and I say this with all the deepest respect to those who live in the cities, and recognizing the importance of public transportation and the importance of government to fund those systems in the urban areas—the importance of your own vehicle is just as paramount for them being able to get around.

In fact, in most cases, in families where both spouses work, it's necessary to own two vehicles in rural Ontario, because the odds of them working in the same place on the same shift are quite small. So the fact is that they have to drive these vehicles and they have to pay those gas taxes. On a proportional basis, on a per capita basis, they pay much more, a much higher share of gas taxes because of the fact that they're not driving around the corner to go to work. In fact, if they were around the corner they'd walk, but they sometimes drive many, many kilometres.

In my case, just for the sake of argument, I live over 85 kilometres away from my constituency office. That's the reality of rural Ontario. I don't single myself out as being hard done by in that regard; that's just the reality of rural Ontario. The member from Algoma–Manitoulin would certainly recognize that. This is why I say it's a fundamental issue of fairness.

The reason that sharing the gas tax is something that would address this fairness is that the municipalities want it. One thing they've always asked for is sustainable, predictable funding from the government, not this hodgepodge of lottery systems that goes out and there are winners and losers every year. They want sustainable, predictable funding. That's in fact what the federal government has done. The predictability is what municipalities have asked for. The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, at the ROMA conference in the wintertime, addressed that as one of their highest priorities: gas tax funding from the provincial government.

I have here a plethora of support letters from municipalities in my riding. I can go through them all but I don't want to use up the clock. For example, the mayor of Petawawa, Bob Sweet, who used to be a warden of Renfrew county and also chair of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, sent me a letter. One sentence of it: "We unconditionally support your bill for gas tax sharing." A letter from Raye-Anne Briscoe, the mayor of Admaston–Bromley; a letter from Sandy Heins, the mayor of Renfrew; a story in today's Daily Observer: County council "unanimously passed a resolution of support" for this bill.

People in rural Ontario want fairness. The Premier is going on about saying that he wants a new deal for Ontario. Well, people within Ontario want a fair deal

from this provincial government. This is one way that they could address it.

They don't have to reinvent the wheel here. We already have a federal government that gives a share of the gas tax to all municipalities, not just those that have a public transportation system. I want to give you an example here. The county of Renfrew, in year five, year 2009-10, will receive from the federal government $2,688,605 in gas tax rebates. The city of Pembroke: $876,664. I can go down every municipality here. In Renfrew county, the five-year total is over $15 million in gas tax revenue from the federal government. Why can one level of government understand and recognize the importance of fairness to all municipalities so that they can repair their public transportation system, which, as we all know, is their roads and bridges?

In my county of Renfrew, we have over 250 bridges. This kind of support would go a long way to allow them to devise a plan that would have an annual maintenance budget to ensure that those bridges were not only kept up but refurbished when necessary, not the idea that they have to go cap in hand to the provincial government, hoping that there might be some money; they might win the lottery.

Of course, what happens in those situations—and it is rather unfair in that regard—is that the government always plays politics with those things. They go out as the saviour of the day, getting all kinds of press releases, and the ministers go all around the province making announcements and telling the people in rural Ontario how wonderful they are—meaning them, the ministers—and how lucky you are—meaning the people—that we came here and left you a cheque, because we're going to look after that bridge.

1010

All of that is appreciated; don't get me wrong. But what is needed is sustainable, predictable, annual funding so that these people can take care of those issues on their own, and so that they can determine where the priorities are and determine which bridge or road gets fixed in year 1, year 2, year 3, year 4 and so on. Not that a minister who is doing this—and I'm not going to impugn on motives, because I know that's not the thing to do here, but there's political motives as well as the intent to try to support municipal infrastructure. We need to remove that political motive and give the communities the tools that they are asking for, that they are begging for, so that they can look after their infrastructure on their own and not rely on the political whim of the government, or throwing their ticket into the drum and hoping it gets drawn.

It was so apparent this year with the MIII how there were winners and losers. Every year with COMRIF, there's winners and losers. So I'm saying that some of that money that you're making winners and losers of, we need to ensure that there's sustainable funding. The fiscal review that's going on right now needs to address some of those things.

One other thing I also want to touch on, because the minister talked about a conference of small urban mayors. With respect to all municipalities, there has to be some consideration for small urban areas in this province as well: those—and I use the city of Pembroke as an example—that don't have the ability to grow their assessment because they're landlocked. What they're getting from the provincial government is very little relative to what they're getting from the federal government. The city of Pembroke got $118,000 this year from the province; from the feds, they're getting $350,000. We have to look at situations like small cities that don't have the ability to grow their assessment because they're landlocked, and there has to be sustainable funding for them that addresses their needs, not just a one-size-fits-all formula across this province.

We have to start being a government and a province that looks at the problems and finds ways to solve them, not ways to generate political goodwill. We have to find ways to solve them. We can start here today by supporting, for the third time—and bringing forward to committee—this bill to support rural municipalities in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: First of all, I want to say as a New Democratic transportation critic that we will be supporting this particular bill, Bill 38—I was going to say Bill 35, but we didn't support that one at all.

I want to just say a couple of things that need to be said, and that is what this is really going to mean to small, rural municipalities. In a lot of situations, as you well know, the population base in a lot of the small municipalities is fairly small. For example, I represent communities that are small, just 300 or 400 people. Let's be real: If you did give them the gas tax that they deserve, it may not be enough to fix some of the municipal roads, culverts and bridges that have to be fixed in our municipalities—

Mr. John Yakabuski: But it will help.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —but it will help. That's the spirit in which we're going to support this as New Democrats, that we see this as a step forward.

The problem, however, is that it doesn't deal with the core issue. I'm glad the member from Renfrew—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —Nipissing–Pembroke, thank you. I'd never be the Speaker of this House, because after 20 years I can't remember what the heck all the names of the ridings are. I remember the members by name.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You're from Timmins–James Bay, by the way.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I remember mine; Timmins–James Bay I do remember.

He spoke about the need to have real, predictable annual funding. That's the issue. In the end, I really bemoan the fact that we've moved way from that. I remember when I was first elected in 1990, municipalities had a number of ministries that they could go to to apply for funding, everything from fixing the water mains under the streets to rebuilding roads that were under connect-

ing-link funding, if they were a connecting link with the province; fixing municipal roads; if you wanted to fix an arena; if a municipality wanted to change a roof on a municipal building. There were all kinds of different programs that municipalities could apply to in order to get funding to build.

For example, where I live, in the city of Timmins, or any other municipality, they would probably make four or five applications a year on different funding applications, and they always got something. So every year there was some form of capital investment made in the municipality. You may apply for five projects and get two or three of them approved. Municipalities didn't generally complain too much because they knew that if two were not approved, they had a chance the following year and the third year to get them approved. So you were able to do planning in some form to make sure that our infrastructure was maintained.

Unfortunately, I just want to remind the member that under the term of the Mike Harris government, we got rid of that. I really bemoan that. I think that was a huge mistake. We basically collapsed all of the funding of the various ministries and we put it into SuperBuild. Then we said, "Look at that. We've got more money to give to infrastructure than at any time before." It was less money. We had more money when it was spread across more ministries. One of the ways that the government decided to balance it's budget was to take money away from capital and call this thing SuperBuild, which is overall less money on capital now than we use to spend. About a month ago, I looked at the estimates binders from 1990—the year I was elected—to where it is now, and we actually spend less money on capital now than we did back then. People need to recognize that that is the fact.

Why are municipal infrastructures collapsing? Why is it that we have bridges in Chatham and different places across the province falling and collapsing; roads having huge frost heaves, especially in northern Ontario and other places, that are falling apart? It's because municipalities don't have the money to do the work they need to do.

I agree with the member that we need to have predictable funding. We need to have something that has a formula of some type that says, "If you're a municipality of 300 people or 300,000 or three million, there is a mechanism and a formula by which you're going to get some predictable funding every year. Then you can go out and plan."

For example, if I'm the community of Mattice and I have a formula that says I'm going to get X amount of dollars, and I know I'm going to get that every year for the next five years or whatever it might be, I can go out and do some planning with my council. Mayor and council can sit around the table and say, "Okay, let's prioritize. That road over there has got to be fixed. That's the biggest complaint we've got in our municipality. But, by the way, we've got to retrofit the windows in our municipal hall because our hydro bills are going through the roof." They can make some informed decisions about what needs to be done in their municipalities.

The problem we now have is that there's only one way to get money—two, actually, but really only one way to get money—and that's through this COMRIF thing that we've got. I call it COMRIF—I know there's another name for it—but this whole process of having all municipalities apply at the same time for the same pot of money. And there will always be people who are disappointed.

For example, in my riding, in this last MIII round, we actually got more money than most other ridings in Ontario. We got somewhere around $17 million, which was pretty good. The problem is, for some of the municipalities in our riding—Timmins and Kapuskasing had huge infrastructure projects that I think took up about $13 million of that, or almost $14 million. So the community of Hearst, which has some real needs when it comes to infrastructure, got frozen out again. Why? Because the province had to make a choice.

I don't blame or fault the province for this; I fault the policy. Do you fix a road or do you fix a crumbling waterline in Kapuskasing? Do you fix the road or do you make sure that the water system in Timmons meets the standard? That's the dilemma that municipalities find themselves in and the province finds itself in. So I say we need to go back to what we used to do before, where each ministry had a capital budget—the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, etc.—so that they're able to do their own capital funding. For example, with the police, the Solicitor General's office used to have capital funding so that they could provide money to the OPP to fix their detachments and to do the capital work that needed to be done.

It used to be that way. I know Mr. Brown would remember that. Back in the 1990s and 1980s, when you got here, that's the way it worked. Again, it gave everybody an opportunity to at least plan, over a period of time, maintaining their infrastructure. Since getting rid of all that and moving to what was SuperBuild—now we call it COMRIF or MIII or whatever—it's become much more competitive for municipalities to go out and get dollars.

I just want to say to the member that we will support this legislation because we think it's a form of incrementalism. It will certainly assist; it's not going to hurt. Will it mean a lot of money for the town of Mattice? No, probably not, because they're a smaller municipality, but as the member says, every dollar you can put into their budget is a dollar they don't have. It's going to be welcome for sure.

The one thing that has driven absolutely everybody else crazy is the first program, which was the gas tax for the people who have transit in their municipalities. A lot of other municipalities have argued exactly what the member says, which is, "Hey, we may not have transit, but we have an infrastructure to maintain. Why are we being penalized?" On the basis of that, I'll support it. But I really think this Legislature has to go back and look at stable, predictable funding that municipalities can plan with; otherwise, we're always going to be chasing the tail.

1020

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I want to thank the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for bringing this bill before us today. I think it's important, because what it speaks to is providing the capital we need in small communities to do those projects on our roads and bridges. That's an important concept. My own view is that this does not help small communities very much, and I'll tell you why—I represent 37 of them, just so you know.

The largest municipality I represent, the city of Elliot Lake, has 11,000 people. It does have mass transit, so it does get the provincial money. I also have Chapleau, Blind River, Espanola and Wawa, which use the two cents they get. Although they don't have mass transit, they do offer service to people with disabilities, and that also qualifies for this money, even if you are a relatively small municipality. So those folks do it.

But the real reason the government provided gas tax money to mass transit systems was to take vehicles off the road, reduce our emissions and make sure the infrastructure of mass transit systems served all the people of Ontario, because my constituents come to places with mass transit, and we also care about pollution, we care about our environment and we care about greenhouse gases. Whether you're in Elliot Lake or Gore Bay or Chapleau, it makes a difference to all of us—to everyone in Ontario.

Do you know what? I was looking at some comments the Leader of the Opposition made here on Sunday, when we talked about the TTC. My friend Mr. Runciman said, "One subway line in Toronto takes 53,000 automobiles per hour off the road during rush hour. The TTC carries the equivalent of 365 million automotive trips annually, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than eight megatonnes…." That affects not only everybody in Ontario; it affects everybody in the world. That is a useful thing, and that's why the two-cent gas tax goes to mass transit; it's fairly simple. That's why it's there.

That does not, however, deal with the fact that small municipalities and roads boards need funds to look after their own infrastructure. This year, the province of Ontario has provided $400 million for roads and bridges, and he can tell us how much his county received for roads and bridges. Every one of his municipalities would have received some of that money, and my guess is that it is more than the gas tax would have generated. My guess is that his municipalities also did fairly well under the MIII program, which provided significant help in my constituency, and I expect in his, for roads and bridges. About $22 million or so flowed into the constituency of Algoma–Manitoulin through those programs—not all for roads and bridges, mind you, but most of it was for roads and bridges, and it helped those municipalities deal with projects that have been on the books, often for quite a while.

You know, it's passing strange for any of us who have been here for a bit to see a Conservative, who downloaded every road on municipalities in the province—he has roads in Renfrew that once were highways and now belong to the county. They did not used to be; they were paid for by the Ministry of Transportation. So I find it a bit disingenuous to see a member of a party that downloaded every road they could find, eliminated operational funding for roads, downloaded all capital funding from roads to the municipalities—

Interjection: And bridges.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: The bridges—which are usually expensive. That's what happened. So this is kind of a "Mike Harris repeal" vision of Ontario.

I think we do need to do something to provide smaller municipalities—and larger ones, for that matter—with capital funding for their roads and bridges. I think every member of this House recognizes that places like Thessalon or Massey are not going to be able to provide that kind of capital money out of the resources of their relatively small tax base.

But the federal tax money is based per capita. I was at a meeting of the Algoma District Municipal Association on Saturday last. When we were talking about that, they said, "Whatever formula the government provides per capita doesn't really work for us." Many of our municipalities—say, Wawa; population 3,500 people—does not receive the kind of assistance that they would receive through a per capita amount of money. What they're looking for is a mixture of assessment versus the cost of maintaining the infrastructure. That was done through the roads and bridges program. I think that is something that benefits rural Ontario far more than any kind of gas tax. And by the way, Wawa actually gets the gas tax because they provide disability transportation.

The other thing that I find problematic with the bill is that it takes away money from mass transportation systems. The two cents of gas tax applies to all of Ontario. So if you take some of that money out to do things for other than mass transit, you're going to reduce the funding to mass transit in the larger cities and the larger communities that provide it. I'm not surprised that his party is in favour of reducing funding to mass transit. So on that level, I also have a great deal of difficulty.

What I hear when I am here in Toronto or in London, Sudbury or Sault Ste. Marie are appeals for more money for mass transit so that we can reduce emissions, we can reduce wear and tear on our roads and we can get our people moving around. This bill would have the effect of reducing it. I don't think that's what the member intends, but I think that would be the effect on support for mass transit through this particular bill.

I cannot believe that he would be in favour of putting 53,000 more cars per hour on the streets of Toronto. I don't think that's what he wants to do. I don't think he wants to create a situation where Ontario produces more greenhouse gases. I don't think he wants to produce more NO_x and SO_x and all those other things that we're about to hear about because we're coming into that season of the year where it's warmer and we have problems with smog days. We don't need anything that would aggravate that anymore.

From my perspective, this bill has merit in that it attempts to provide some stable funding to munici-

palities. I look forward to that funding for municipalities to come out of the provincial–municipal review that's going on. We're soon to hear about how they want to deal with that. I think that's the solution. I don't think this does it because, as I've expressed, it's a problematic issue.

I commend the member for bringing forward this resolution. I will not be able to support it myself. This is private members' hour; members can do as they will. I cannot support it because I believe that it's important to deal with greenhouse gases. I believe it's important to move against NO_x and SO_x and all of those pollution issues. I believe that it's important that we have stable funding for municipalities, which I don't think this does.

1030

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to speak this morning in support of my Progressive Conservative colleague the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the legislation he has proposed, Bill 38. This is not a new issue for my colleague. In fact, today is his third try because he believes so strongly in the issue of fairness for all of us, and fairness is important for all of us in the PC Party.

During my inaugural speech in this House, I spoke of the need for immediate relief required by municipalities for transportation infrastructure in their ridings and, quite frankly, ridings all across Ontario.

This government prides itself on the fact that it spent $400 million on roads and bridges in March of this year. There's no doubt that this money was desperately needed by municipalities throughout the province.

Mayor Morrison, of the town of Caledon, cited the government's announcement as good news. However—there's always a "however"—she also made a very important point: "The only downfall I see is that if Ontario went into a recession, this money wouldn't be there." And what did we learn this week? We learned that Ontario is slipping into a recession and furthermore risks have-not status within Canada for the first time since Confederation.

Predictable funding is what our municipal partners are looking for. This is the issue that the Progressive Conservative member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is trying to address. Right now, Mayor Morrison in Caledon and all of Dufferin–Caledon, with the exception of one—that being Orangeville—did not receive a portion of the gas tax revenue because they do not have a public transportation system. So if you're a commuter in Caledon or Dufferin, you are not being treated fairly by this government. This government has to realize that the only source of funding for many municipalities is general property taxes and user fees.

Yet ultimately, this is about fairness. How can you justify using gas tax on certain transit infrastructure but not on roads and bridges? Every time a resident of this province goes to the gas station, we all know that a large proportion of what they're paying goes to taxes. What many voters are surprised about is that gas taxes are not used equally across the province on roads, bridges and yes, transit. But be fair: Roads and bridges need to be included. Why, then, should we be funding the municipalities to receive transportation and infrastructure changes depending on whether you're lucky enough to have a transit system?

This Liberal government talks about treating municipalities as partners, but in fact they treat them quite differently. In past elections, the Ontario Liberals made a campaign promise that every municipality would get a share of the gasoline tax. Then again, they also said, "No new taxes," but they gave us the health tax.

Bill 38, the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Amendment Act, needs to be supported by all members of this House, not because they're rural or because they're urban but because it is an issue of fairness. It addresses the issue that the current system is not fair across Ontario and certainly is not fair for the rural municipalities of this province because of how they have unevenly distributed gas tax.

I will proudly support this bill, and I'm confident that my constituents will agree with me.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to speak on this bill. It's a bill that I'm going to support. It's sad that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke had to bring it back for the third time, but that's not unusual in this place. I know that on the benches of the government, the member for Niagara Falls brought in a very worthy bill three times, and he's a member of the governing party. It still hasn't seen the light of day in terms of committee time and being passed into law.

I wanted to make a general point about private members' business and the fact that this is a government that doesn't take any private members' public business seriously. And with the standing order changes, that's even going to be diminished. As little as it is in terms of import to this government, it's going to lose even that because, instead of Thursday morning that we discuss these bills, it's going to be Thursday afternoon. As you look around the chamber, you see that there are probably a quarter of the members here today. Well, imagine, if this was Thursday afternoon, how many members would be here and how many would even be listening to public business here and private members' bills—certainly fewer than are here now. So we're moving in a dangerous direction. We're going to be moving in that direction as of Monday because of closure on behalf of this government.

But to the point at hand here: dealing with this transportation bill. I was listening to the comments from the member for Algoma–Manitoulin that it's either/or. Isn't it sad that we have to choose now in the province of Ontario between public transportation, validly funded, and an infrastructure in our municipalities, no matter how small or large they are? Isn't it sad that we have to choose between buses running and roads working? This is a sad and sorry state of affairs. I know in the city of Toronto, where we're shortchanged about $700 million a year by this government in terms of demanding an upload of the downloads, we feel it, and we can only imagine what it's like to live in a small town and feel it there as well—potholes in the roads.

There used to be a time when you would drive down to the States from the province of Ontario and you would immediately notice a difference as you passed over the border from our wonderful road system to their not-so-wonderful road system, from a beautiful driving surface, for example, to potholes on the other side of the border. Now, I really challenge any member here to do that same drive, and they'll find the opposite. They'll find that the roads are better on the other side of the border than they are here, that the infrastructure, by and large, is better kept up in New York state than it is in Ontario.

Why is that? How has it come to that in the province of Ontario? It's because we don't have stable funding for our municipalities. It's because we are constantly underfunding the city of Toronto and constantly underfunding every small municipality. This is the situation. As the member said, you have mayors going hat in hand every year, hoping for crumbs from the master's table, hoping for just a dollar or two.

Let me tell you, they're not going to get it from Bill 35. Bill 35, that's just been passed, is a government bill. The only way, by the way, you get bills passed is if they come from the Premier's office, a Premier-generated bill. Bill 35, the slush fund bill, as we call it on this side of the House, doesn't mention municipalities or infrastructure, that supposedly gives the crumbs from the master's table, what's left over when all the other provincial bills have been paid to cities like Toronto and other smaller municipalities. It doesn't mention municipalities or infrastructure at all in that bill. What it does say is that the government can give money wherever it sees fit to any non-profit. Well, we've seen what that looks like. We saw what that looked like last year: It looks like $32 million to friends of the Liberal Party. That's what it looks like, and that's what we're going to get again this year. If there's money left over whatsoever, it'll go to friends of the Liberal Party and whatever causes they support.

We already see that the problem here opens itself up to pork-barrelling of the worst kind, where some municipalities get more funding than others. I know in the case of housing, we looked at a map of where affordable housing is going, and guess what? Eighty per cent of those lucky enough to get the crumbs—and they are crumbs that go to affordable housing—are in Liberal ridings.

So without stable funding, without an uploading of the downloads across the province, what you get is this egregious situation, where it's "Be nice to us, and we'll be nice to you." Depending on who you are, where you are and whom you elect, maybe you'll get some money. I see the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke nodding. Maybe you'll get some money, maybe you won't, right, John? Maybe you will, maybe you won't, depending on how close you are. We're talking about proximity—probably mileage here—between the Premier's office and the heart of Queen's Park and where you live. So it's very, very sad.

Public transport or small municipalities infrastructure funding: It's no wonder that it's crumbling. It's no wonder that bridges are in jeopardy. It's no wonder mayors are feeling increasingly like that child in Oliver Twist: "Please, sir, a little bit more." It's no wonder that across the province things are looking increasingly bad in terms of the upkeep of what we need to function, because there simply isn't the funding there. It's simply not there, and Bill 35 isn't going to help that.

It's sad that members have to come to private members' business with bills to support their own bailiwicks. They shouldn't have to use private members' business to do that, to beg for a maternity ward here, beg for a bridge there, beg for a road here or there, which is essentially what this bill does. It simply says, "We're not getting what we need. Please, sir, a little bit more. Please give us just what we need."

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So it's with sadness that I stand and support this bill. I shouldn't have to. It shouldn't have to be brought forward, and certainly, as you can see from the numbers in the House, there's no great interest in supporting our municipalities, our small towns and villages. There's not a lot of interest in supporting the city of Toronto, not a lot of interest in supporting that.

But it's always a pleasure to stand, even in an empty House. It's going to get emptier, Mr. Speaker, it's going to get emptier. It's even a pleasure standing in an empty House supporting a member who supports the people that he represents—his own constituents—against a government that doesn't care.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Although the honourable member wasn't referring to any particular member's attendance, I would caution members to refrain from that line of debate. Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I am certainly pleased to rise and speak to the bill, which I do want to state up front I will not be supporting. Now I want to put forward why.

As many of you know, I represent the most rural riding in the province. It encompasses 18 municipalities. The largest urban area I have is just around the 7,000 mark. But one of the things that I wanted to talk about today was my smallest municipality, that being the municipality of South Bruce. Just for those who know my riding, it includes Teeswater, Mildmay and Formosa. They're all villages and hamlets.

I will remind everyone who is watching the TV today that we are hosting the plowing match in Bruce county, in Teeswater, in 2008, so I encourage everyone to come in.

One of the things I wanted to talk about was the federal gas tax that South Bruce receives today. In 2007, they received just $78,000; in 2008, $98,000; and in 2009, $197,000. For their allocation of roads and bridges this year, from this budget, they received $1.2 million. I know that across the way you know this, but what you have failed to understand is how what you have proposed will hurt my municipalities. When I look at how long it will take if we move forward in the same formula as gas tax, how long will it take my municipality to pay for a bridge?

We know today that there are a number of bridges in this municipality that need to be fixed. I hear from my

farmers that they can't get their produce out. Because the bridges are in such a poor state, they can't go across them safely with the weight of the trailers that they are hauling. So I say to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke across the House: $650,000 roughly, we'll say that's the cost of a bridge, roughly. So, by your calculations, if I use the same formula, it would take my municipality four years to do one bridge.

Now, when I look at what was allocated of the $400 million from roads and bridges, when we move forward with a formula that was weighted—had a weighted factor for northern and rural communities—my municipality: $1.2 million. What does this represent for my smallest municipality, South Bruce? This represents two new bridges that they can work within. They also understand that there will be other funding coming. This gives them the ability to work and to forecast where they need to go, whereas your formula does not do that. Not only does it withdraw funding from public transit, it also inadvertently—I think it's inadvertently; I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt because, quite frankly, your track record leaves a lot to be desired.

You sit there and you laugh about this, but in my riding what you did was—there are only three provincial roads left—you downloaded every bridge. You downloaded every road. There was so much done. I tell you, when you were downloading, we had to pour water on our fax machines to keep them cool. You were downloading. There wasn't even any consultation that was done.

So, you talk about the relationship with the municipalities today. I can tell you, my municipality of South Bruce—they get it, and they understand.

We've talked about the $400 million; we've laid that out. Now, let's talk about the $450 million. This funding, if you will recall, was $140 million in the first announcement. It was dedicated to rural communities. It was $70 million, and at the plowing match, it was increased another $70 million, with a total capacity of $140 million.

What the municipalities wanted was a shortened application. That's what they asked for. They did not want to go into such an intensive application process, especially for rural communities. It places them at a disadvantage, because quite frankly, they don't have the staff who can apply themselves to do such extensive applications. So we did that: $140 million for that.

Then we came forward with $450 million—$300 million at ROMA, another $150 million announced; $450 million was the scope—that that was going directly to infrastructure. Not only a shortened application, but the municipalities wanted it to include arenas, libraries and much more. That was done, too. We heard, we listened and we acted. So that funding in Huron–Bruce represents over $10 million. The total asked was $14 million. What they received was over $10 million. My riding received $28 million from one budget.

In contrast to how the previous government treated my rural communities—and in rural communities we don't forget how people treat us—I say to you, I'm going to assume that you did not do this intentionally to once again put the boots to the municipalities.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm very pleased to speak on behalf of the bill in the name of my colleague, Mr. Yakabuski. I strongly support Bill 38, as I did its previous incarnation. Mr. Yakabuski has brought a substantial, sensible and far-looking piece of legislation to the House, and I'm pleased to strongly support it.

Listening to my colleagues opposite on the Liberal side—not to name particular names or ridings—you wonder how many are so keen to curry favour with the staffers that gather around the Premier, rather than fight for funding for their individual ridings. It's absolutely mind-boggling; we saw some cases just a few minutes ago. This is a no-brainer. Mr. Yakabuski's project would bring forward more funding for the ridings of the Liberal members who have spoken than the current funding formula, which spends almost half the money going to the city of Toronto.

Secondly, what I heard my colleagues opposite say is that municipal politicians in Blind River, South Bruce, Exeter or Espanola can't make responsible decisions. Mr. Yakabuski's bill would do the following: It would say to the mayor of South Bruce or the mayor of Espanola, "Do you want to spend the gas tax money on roads, bridges or transit; or a combination of both?" Mr. Yakabuski's bill would give them that choice.

The Dalton McGuinty Liberals and the sycophants opposite say, "They're not capable of making that decision. It can only go into transit, instead of roads and bridges." Huron–Bruce has a preposterous proposal—and I question her math—saying that Mr. Yakabuski's bill would mean that a bridge would be funded over four years. But, under the current funding formula, which dedicates every penny to transit, most of it going to the TTC, that bridge would take how long to build? Forever; an eternity, because not one dime flows to that bridge under the McGuinty funding formula, which is heavily, heavily weighted to the city of Toronto and transit municipalities. I believe that municipal leaders in Niagara West–Glanbrook will make the responsible decision.

We see the federal gas tax bill, which allows them to decide whether they want to put it into roads, bridges or transit. Here's the comparison: Under the federal gas tax, Grimsby receives $1.7 million; Lincoln, $1.67 million; Pelham, $1.2 million; and West Lincoln, $997,000—almost a million over its mandate.

Do you know what those municipalities get under Dalton McGuinty's gas tax funding formula? Butkis, zero, zippo, goose egg, nada, nothing, because Dalton McGuinty does not trust municipal politicians to invest the money according to the priorities of those local municipalities.

Mr. Yakabuski's approach is the right one, it's a superior choice, and it would mean more funds for local transportation infrastructure in the riding of Niagara West–Glanbrook. I strongly support Bill 38.

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Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to join this debate today and support my colleague from Renfrew–Nipis-

sing–Pembroke on Bill 38, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to the assistance that the Minister provides to municipalities.

We are addressing this issue for the third time in this Legislature. Third time lucky, maybe, or third time, is the Liberal government going to listen to this? He's been very determined in representing his riding and the needs of his constituents, bringing much-needed assistance to rural municipalities, not only in his riding, but the whole province. So when the Liberal members opposite think they are treating their rural municipalities fairly, they've got it all wrong. The Kool-Aid that is being served over there—

Laughter.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I hear the member for Northumberland laughing. This type of system where you put in applications—the municipalities spend thousands of dollars filling out these forms and hoping their name is drawn out of the hat. What kind of responsible, predictable, sustainable planning is that for municipalities? You are not being fair to municipalities.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Some municipalities have been fortunate. They've been able to succeed in their application forms, but every year they sit there with their fingers crossed, thinking, "Okay, if I don't get it, what am I going to do? Let's hope we get it," and shifting monies. It's unfair to them. The federal government produced a program that gave them more money—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: What program?

Ms. Laurie Scott: The gas tax program—we'll answer the questions. They can share that with municipalities, and they get a lot more money and it is sustainable and predictable every year.

Last week, the member for Nepean–Carleton brought forward a resolution about the importance of a bridge construction in one of her communities in her riding. One of the things she said was that bridges are about connecting communities; so are roads, so are highways. Rural Ontario roads, highways and bridges are our infrastructure, they are our public transit.

In my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, I've talked many times about the need for the four-laning expansion of Highway 35, which would benefit the whole area. It comes through Kawartha Lakes, but it would benefit all of my riding. This is what we need to advance the economic lifelines to our communities. County Road 24 in the Bobcaygeon area needs a bridge repair. It's an occurrence that came up suddenly. The price to replace that bridge—and the member for Huron–Bruce mentioned a price to replace a bridge and I've never heard of a bridge being replaced for such a low value as she mentioned. These are high-value items of $1 million or $2 million. The price to replace that bridge on County Road 24 in Bobcaygeon is nearly equal to the municipality's whole annual transportation portion of their budget.

I have Algonquin Highlands in Haliburton county that has a bridge that needs to be replaced. They applied for MIII, but guess what? They weren't one of the lottery winners. What can I say? They're devastated. They've applied several times. It's just not fair what you're doing to municipalities. It's not fair to rural Ontario.

The gas tax money goes to the urban communities; nothing wrong with public transportation in urban communities. We're asking for rural Ontario to be treated fairly. This government laughs and says that they're not going to support it. I just wonder, are the rural municipalities in the Liberal ridings really going to be happy that you voted this down? I don't think so. Maybe we should do some press releases in your ridings and see how excited they are that you denied them their fairness in gas tax money in the province of Ontario. I support this bill and I encourage the Liberal members to.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity this morning to speak in support of Bill 38, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to the assistance that the Minister provides to municipalities. I want to congratulate the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for bringing this issue forward yet again. He's been persistent on this issue. He's spoken out on it repeatedly and the House should listen to him and support this bill today.

I'm very surprised and somewhat disappointed—well, quite disappointed, actually—that some of the Liberal members have indicated they are not going to support this bill. I would remind them that this bill has already received second reading support in this House and has gone to committee in the past. If some of them change their votes, I'm not sure how they're going to explain that to their constituents, because I understand this is the same bill, if not the identical bill—is it the identical bill?

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Arnott: It's the very same bill that was passed by this House at second reading some time ago in the previous Parliament.

The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is absolutely right: Provincial gas tax money should be shared with all municipalities, not just the cities. Actually, one of the most topical issues of discussion in the coffee shops today in Wellington–Halton Hills, and I dare say around the province, is the high price of gasoline, hovering at around $1.20 a litre. We see projections by experts who tell us that it may hit as high as $1.40 or even $1.50 this summer. We see the price of crude oil hovering just over $100 a barrel. We see supply bottlenecks because of lack of refining capacity, and a worldwide surge in demand for oil. The price of gasoline is going to continue to stay high, it appears, for some time. It's a serious concern for people in my riding; it's a concern that I share.

But what's worse is the fact that the provincial government takes 14.7 cents a litre out of everybody's pocket in terms of their purchase of gasoline and refuses to share that with our small and rural municipalities, unlike the federal government, that takes some gas tax but that some time ago took a policy decision to share that money with all municipalities. Of course, the com-

munities in my riding benefit from that. I can't understand why Liberal members from rural ridings are unwilling to stand up for their municipalities today with respect to this issue. I cannot understand it. I think they're going to have a very difficult time explaining this to their communities when they go home.

Of course, in their defence, what they have said is that the government has other programs to assist small and rural municipalities with their infrastructure needs. They point to the roads and bridges funding that was announced in the budget, and the municipal infrastructure investment initiative that was announced initially in the fall economic statement, and more details came forward. Some of the municipalities in my riding received support from the municipal infrastructure investment initiative. Two were shut out, unfortunately: the town of Erin and the township of Puslinch. I'm still trying to get explanations and answers as to why those communities were shut out. There was no appeal process, unfortunately. There seems to be no debriefing process whereby municipalities can be informed as to why they were unsuccessful with their applications. I supported all the applications coming forward from my constituents, as I think all of us would have wanted to. The town of Erin, in particular, made good points. Their roads superintendent, Larry Van Wyck, brought forward very important points about the cost of maintenance of gravel roads that I don't think the government has considered, and I hope they will in future rounds. Certainly, the roads and bridges funding, while it was appreciated—we cannot count on that money for next year, because we know that the province appears to be going into an economic downturn. It appears we're in recession right now. It's likely that we're going to have a deficit, so there isn't going to be any money, apparently, at the end of the fiscal year for municipalities.

That is why this Bill 38 is needed, to ensure that our municipalities do receive fairness and a sustainable and predictable stream of funding for their infrastructure needs. I have huge infrastructure needs in Wellington–Halton Hills that I will continue to bring to the attention of this government, insisting that more support be brought forward by the provincial government for those needs. I have a private member's resolution of my own that I hope to bring forward on roads and bridges funding. I would hope that all members of this House will support this bill, and I again congratulate the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Yakabuski has up to two minutes to reply.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank all of the members from all parties for standing and speaking on my bill here this morning.

I want to address a couple things that were raised by the members of the governing party, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin and the member for Huron–Bruce. They talk about an either/or. They talk about how this is going to cost municipalities that are currently getting gas tax. They use the example of the $400 million that all municipalities got earlier this year for infrastructure projects. But there are other ways of ensuring that public transportation in this province gets funding. In fact, there was $1 billion handed out at the end of the year. Toronto got $497 million of that—$497 million. So they don't tell you the whole story. I'm really flabbergasted by these rural members who want to take that message back to their constituents, saying that they voted against a bill that would be sustainable. The MIII and the municipal funding that we got this year—I have already said we appreciate that. But what is on the table for next year? No one really knows. This is not sustainable. Rural municipalities have been asking for fairness. It's a fundamental issue of fairness.

The Premier says he wants fairness in taxation. What are you doing to rural people, those people who work hard in rural communities but have to drive to work each and every day? They pay gas taxes, but you don't give it back. You don't give any of it back.

You're talking about funding? The city of Toronto still got an additional $497 million. They still got all their gas tax. I'm not picking on the city of Toronto; I'm talking about fairness for rural municipalities. There's only one way to do it: Each and every municipality has to get a share of the gas tax that they pay. I encourage these rural members to stand up for their people.

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LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (CERTIFICATION), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (ACCRÉDITATION)

Mr. Hampton moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to certification of trade unions / Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail en ce qui a trait à l'accréditation des syndicats.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Hampton, pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Let me begin by welcoming a number of people who work out there, in workplace after workplace, helping workers to organize. Let me also thank the three young workers who came to the Legislature yesterday to participate in a press conference with me. These three young workers—two of them young women, one a young man—know what it's like to work in a workplace where you're harassed, where you are often subject to verbal abuse, to threats of, "If you don't do this or you don't do that, you're going to be fired"; workers who had the courage to talk to other workers and say, "We deserve to be treated with dignity and respect," and who talked to other workers and persuaded them to sign a union card; workers who suffered further harassment, further abuse, because they dared to suggest that

those workers should enjoy the democratic and constitutionally protected right of freedom of association. I especially want to thank Jennifer Law, Denise Cachia and Sherwin Flight.

Let me briefly explain what this bill is about. For almost 50 years in the province of Ontario, if workers wanted to join a union, all they really had to do was to sign a card. They would sign a card and the law was that if 55% or more of the workers in that workplace signed a card, then they could have a union. The union could represent them and bargain for wages, benefits, pensions and job security, the things that I think most of us want to believe we should all enjoy in a country like Canada, one of the wealthiest countries in the world. But implemented in 1996 was a change in labour law which said that workers could no longer, by signing a card, be recognized as part of a trade union. They would not only have to sign a card, but they would have to wait, in some cases a week, in some cases much longer, to hold a vote. What would happen in that time is the employer could resort to all kinds of tactics of intimidation, threats of firing, threats of, "We're going to get you."

I think most of us, if we think about it, would feel that there's something wrong with that. We're talking about a constitutionally protected right here, the right to freedom of association. All these young workers—in many cases they are young workers; in many cases they're women; in many cases they're new Canadians, vulnerable workers. All they're trying to do is exercise a constitutionally protected right of freedom of association. Why, in a country that prides itself, in a province that prides itself, as democratic, should they be subjected to abuse? Why should they be subjected to threats of, "We're going to get you, we're going to fire you"? If most people thought about it for a minute, they'd say, "There's something wrong with that." But that is the state of things in Ontario today. Young workers, women, and especially new Canadian workers who seek to exercise the freedom of association in workplaces in Ontario today are frequently subjected to abuse, intimidation, threats of, "We're going to get you. We're going to fire you. We're going to push you out the door." So this bill is intended to help address that.

I'm not pretending that this bill will fix every one of those issues, but this bill will bring some balance back into Ontario's labour law situation and it will bring some balance in terms of recognizing what is supposed to be a constitutionally protected right in Canada: the freedom of association.

Before I go further, I just want to say—I know this might shock some members on the government side—that card-based certification is the law in the province to the east of us, Quebec; it's the law in the next province after that, to the east of us, New Brunswick; it's the law in the province to the west of us, Manitoba; and it's the law in the next westerly province, Saskatchewan. They believe in ensuring that workers should be able to exercise the constitutionally protected right of freedom of association.

I'm given to ask, what's wrong with Ontario? Why is Ontario the province where we are reticent to ensure that the most vulnerable workers—women, young workers and new Canadians—why are we so reticent in Ontario to recognize and to help implement this constitutionally protected right? If it works in Quebec—and I notice that Quebec's economy is doing rather better than Ontario's; if it works in Manitoba—and I notice that Manitoba's economy is doing rather better than Ontario's in terms of sustaining jobs; if it works in Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, then why the reticence on the part of government members, Liberal members, to help sustain and implement this constitutionally protected right in Ontario?

I also want to point out this: As I said earlier, this was the law in Ontario, until that law was effectively changed in 1996. From 1950 until 1996, Ontario enjoyed annual economic growth of almost 4% a year. Our economic growth was actually better than in the United States, where there is no card-based certification. So for those who say, "Well, if you have card-based certification, it's going to harm your economy," you couldn't prove it by looking at what happened in Ontario and what happened in the United States from 1950 until 1996.

The other point I would make is that since Ontario did away with card-based certification in 1996, economic growth has averaged only 3%. So for those who say, "Oh, if you act to allow workers to better exercise their freedom of association, it's somehow going to hurt the economy and hurt jobs," you couldn't prove it by looking at the United States and Ontario, and you couldn't prove it by looking at Ontario when Ontario had card-based certification and now when Ontario doesn't have card-based certification.

In fact, the economic evidence indicates that it's the other way, and there are reasons for that. The people who benefit most from card-based certification are not your highest-paid workers. The people who benefit most are the lowest-paid workers: women, who often work in part-time jobs or who are often on call; students; younger workers; new Canadians; people who often work at minimum wage or just a little bit above. What the evidence shows is that those are the workers who benefit from being able to exercise their freedom of association through card-based certification.

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Does it mean that overnight they get huge, whopping pay increases? No. What it means is that they can get, through collective bargaining, a decent wage. In many cases, they might be able to get a benefit package at work, so they can afford glasses for their children or maybe dental coverage for their children. It might even mean that they have a chance at a pension and won't have to worry about living in poverty as they grow older—all things that I think most of us would want most Canadians to have; all things that we would want to see most workers in Ontario enjoy.

This is about some social and economic justice. This is about ensuring that people who work very hard but often work for very low wages have an opportunity to imple-

ment more fully the constitutionally protected right of freedom of association and then effectively translate that freedom of association into a better life, not only for themselves and their families but for their community, because they'll be able to make a bigger economic contribution to their community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I would like to speak to Bill 65. Our government supports fair and balanced labour relations. Ontario's prosperity has historically relied on a fair and balanced approach to labour relations. Fairness and balance promote confidence in the law, which encourages productive relationships. We brought forward the Labour Relations Statute Law Amendment Act in 2004 to restore Ontario's fair and balanced labour relations regime.

Over the years, Ontario saw a departure from those principles. Long-term stability was sacrificed for short-term advantage. The so-called advantage in labour relations swung back and forth—at one time in favour of the worker, at another in favour of the employer. This lack of stability caused confusion and had a negative impact on productivity in our province.

We restored balance. We got rid of irritants brought in by the previous government, such as the decertification poster and the requirement for unions to publicly declare salaries over $100,000. We strengthened the Ontario Labour Relations Board's historical, long-standing power to address the worst labour relations violations with effective remedies. We restored the board's power to certify a union where an employer had breached the province's labour relations laws during a union organizing campaign. We balanced that by giving the board the power to dismiss an application for certification where the union violates the act during an organizing campaign in circumstances where no other remedy is sufficient.

We also restored the OLRB's power to reinstate workers on an interim basis who were fired or disciplined during a union organizing campaign because they were exercising their rights under the act. We recognized that dismissal during an organizing campaign can have an immediate negative effect on workers trying to make a decision about whether to seek representation. Restoring the power to order interim reinstatement enables the OLRB to respond to any potential harm caused by a dismissal in a timely way, pending a final ruling in the matter.

We believe that the government's role during a certification or decertification campaign is not to favour one side or the other but to ensure that the choice made is an effective and informed choice to the extent possible, free of undue pressure. Employees must be free to choose without fear of reprisals. They must be free to choose whether or not they want to be represented by a union.

In the Labour Relations Statute Law Amendment Act, we did add an additional means by which a union could be certified in the construction sector. In addition to a vote-based system, the act added a card-based system to this unique sector. From 1950 to 1995, a union certification system based on membership cards was the norm. Automatic certification would take place if a union signed up more than 55% of the bargaining unit.

We did not propose a return to that system for all sectors. Construction, however, is unique. The construction sector is characterized by workplaces that change constantly, and a workplace that is both very mobile and that can change size constantly. Attempting to accurately ascertain the wishes of the employees in such circumstances can be very, very difficult. For this reason, we added an additional means of certification. In doing so, we recognized that the law has long recognized the unique nature of construction.

We believe that our reforms have been effective in restoring and maintaining fairness and balance in our labour relations. We have restored confidence in Ontario's labour relation system.

I do not support Bill 65, because any changes to the current labour relations regime would only tilt the scales to favour one side over the other. This is neither fair nor balanced. Fairness and balance have been the historical guarantors of prosperity in this great province, the foundation on which the province's prosperity has been built. Fairness and balance promote confidence in the labour relation system, and confidence is essential to stability and success. Confidence in our labour relations system also encourages productivity, and that can only benefit both workers and employers.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm glad to have the opportunity to participate in today's debate on Bill 65, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to the certification of trade unions.

As the member of provincial Parliament for Sarnia–Lambton, I'm proud to say that in the past, I have been a member of two bargaining units and have sat on the other side of the table as well. I've helped organize those unions in the past, and I am a strong believer in the unions.

In Sarnia, we are very lucky that we have a high level of co-operation between our unions and management, particularly when it comes to health and safety issues. In fact, they talk about that as the Sarnia model as far as health and safety. I've met with the chairman of the WSIB and the Minister of Labour as well, and it's a model they would like to take across Ontario to improve workers' health and safety.

I will start off by saying that I can't support this bill for a number of reasons. First, I don't believe in an automatic card-based certification of trade unions in general. Second, I think that taking away a worker's democratic right to have a secret ballot is wrong. Third, why would we as legislators want to radically change labour relations laws, given the current problems in our economy?

It is important that we understand what this bill would do. The bill amends the Labour Relations Act to allow the Ontario Labour Relations Board to certify a trade union as the bargaining agent of the employees in a bargaining unit without directing a representation vote by

secret ballot if it is satisfied that more than 55% of the employees are in the union.

Also, the board may hold a hearing when considering an application for certification, whereas under the present act the board is not allowed to hold a hearing under those circumstances.

As I said, I don't believe card-based certification alone is the way to go for such an important decision as forming a union. As has been pointed out, card-based certification is now allowed in the construction industry, and I believe that should be continued and maintained. It has led to some issues, I understand. I had some people in to see me the other day in my office. I understand that the city of Hamilton at this time is involved in a dispute with one of the unions that has effectively, in their opinion, put on hold a number of upgrades that they would like to do to their municipal infrastructure. This dispute means the projects that the city of Hamilton is considering moving forward are going to cost a lot more, and in the end it will be the municipal ratepayers who will have to make up the difference.

I understand why the government allowed automatic card-based certification in the construction industry. No one on this side of the House, myself in particular, is advocating that we take that away at all. Our party just doesn't see a need to expand it to other sectors.

The second reason why I can't support this bill is that in 1995, when my party amended the Labour Relations Act and brought in the secret ballot for union certification votes, we introduced an element of democracy that we, as members of this Legislative Assembly, all take for granted. Each and every one of us, when we first ran, probably ran in a nomination process to become a candidate, and then, a few weeks or months later, also faced the voters in each of our respective ridings, where all of those voters cast their ballots to pick and choose each one of us.

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In 1995, the current member for Kitchener–Waterloo introduced Bill 7, which was one of our key campaign commitments in the election campaign. When she introduced that bill, she stated: "Secret ballot votes will be made mandatory for union certifications, contract ratifications and strike votes. Each individual will now have the democratic right to vote on whether or not they want to be represented by a trade union."

The member, at that time, also stated: "What could make more sense than to allow the individual worker more democratic options in making one of the most important decisions of their working life, whether or not to be represented by a trade union?"

It was right to do then, and it's still right today.

What we found in a card-based certification process is that once you sign the card, you have no ability to change your mind later. We believe it is only fair to give workers that chance to express their opinion via secret ballot. When we offered ourselves for election in this place, we all trusted the secret ballot. To not allow our workers that same treatment just seems wrong to me. Forming a trade union is an important decision, and in our party, we believe that workers have a right to a secret ballot.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Standing up for democracy—those are the Tories I know.

Mr. Robert Bailey: That's right.

The third reason I can't support this bill is that if it were to pass, it would introduce more uncertainty into this economy at this time. That's the last thing we need to happen right now. We are bleeding manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario. The member for Wellington–Halton Hills reminded us just yesterday that Campbell Soup is closing their plant in Listowel, and that will mean the end of 500 jobs in a community of 6,000 people. The government is doing nothing to stop this hemorrhaging. As the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook pointed out yesterday, the government is doing nothing to help save the CanGro jobs in Niagara.

We also saw a report yesterday from the TD Bank saying that Ontario is moving very fast into becoming a have-not province and will soon be eligible to receive equalization payments. To introduce an element of uncertainty at this time wouldn't make any sense. I agree with the government on this, and frankly, I was glad to hear the Minister of Labour admit, that the last thing the government would want to do is radically change any of our labour laws, given the current challenges in the Ontario economy.

Now that we finally have the government admitting that there is a challenge in the economy, maybe we will see some action.

For all these reasons, I will not be supporting this bill.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm pleased and proud to stand here with other New Democrats, speaking in support of Howard Hampton's Bill 65.

When we speak in this chamber, we don't just speak to our colleagues, we speak to the people of Ontario. So, I say now to sisters and brothers, working women and men across this province, this bill is designed to ensure that the right of people in a democratic nation, in a fair-minded society, to belong to a trade union is effected.

Look, I tell you this—I've had occasion to say it to people across this province over the course of many years, and I say it once again with as much passion and commitment as I've ever been able to muster—I truly believe that the trade union movement is more relevant today than it ever has been in the history of this world.

And I say this to you: The trade union movement, the trade unions—its membership and its leadership—have done and continue to do more to create social and economic justice than any other institution in our society.

We should be grateful for the courage, the tenacity, the sacrifice of working women and men in this province, in this country and throughout the world, who have built the trade union movement. It was a bloody fight; it was a deadly fight. People were battered and beaten, people went to jail, people died, people were ostracized and people lost families in their struggle to build the union movement.

My father was a steel worker, he was a trade unionist. He was an immigrant with a grade 8 education. All of his

kids got to go to college and university, not because any of us were particularly brighter than anybody else, but because our father worked in a trade union workshop. He could afford to provide us with a lifestyle—we weren't rich by any stretch of the imagination, but as the children of a trade unionist who fought for better and fairer wages, for a fair share of the wealth that he creates—as every worker has the right to fight for a fair share of the wealth that working people create.

It's the work of people that creates wealth, make no mistake about it. It ain't the Bill Gates of the world. Lord knows it ain't the Conrad Blacks of the world. Conrad Black doesn't create wealth, he steals it. But working women and men create it, and they surely have a right to the fair share of the wealth that they create.

You know, I tell you, I grew up in Welland, born in Crowland. Welland was a UE town. I was inside the labour temple down on Ontario Road before I was ever inside any church. I tell you that without any hesitation. I was mentored by people like Mike Bosnich and John Trufal and, yes, Gordie Lambert from Local 199, one of Canada's great trade unionists; all of them.

I learned then what I strongly believe now, and that is that workers have never had anything given to them. Everything workers have ever acquired, be it a fairer wage, a little safer workplace, a little bit of a pension plan or some health benefits, they've had to fight for. I say it's time for workers to join with the NDP in fighting for the right for card-based certification here and now in the province of Ontario.

As a democratic socialist, I find myself unequivocally committed to worker's struggles and to their interests. New Democrats have never been afraid of standing together with working women and men, shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, when they've been engaged in their struggles. Oh, it's easy for a politician to show up for the photo op with a trade union local president who wants to give a check to United Way, show up with those UFCW workers down in Port Colborne, who've been locked out of Horizon Milling—Robin Hood Mills—now for a year plus a day; denied their right to work and contribute their labour to the productive process.

The right to belong to a union can't be the right of some, it has to be the right of all. Agricultural workers in this province, working in some of the most dangerous, toxic and dirtiest of workplaces, have to have the right to organize, belong to a trade union and freely, collectively bargain as well. So do part-time workers in this province, whether they're in the public or private sector.

In a few minutes, my colleagues Andrea Horwath, the member for Hamilton Centre, and Cheri DiNovo, the member for Parkdale–High Park, are going to be speaking to this bill, too. I tell you, this modest caucus of 10 had to divide the scarce amount of time available to us, to the regret of a whole lot of other members, all of whom wanted to address this bill.

For the life of me, I can't understand why there would be those who would bemoan the loss of jobs in this province, yet not want to see the trade union movement prosper, because the trade union movement has been at the forefront of the fight to keep good jobs in their communities, in this province and in this country. It's never, ever wrong to fight to keep good jobs in your community. It's never, ever wrong to fight for a safer workplace. It's never, ever wrong to fight for a fair pension. And it's never, ever wrong to join sisters and brothers who are fighting for their workplace rights in their workplace, notwithstanding that you don't happen to work there.

1130

The most prosperous countries in this world are countries that have strong trade union movements and countries that have Legislatures and governments that sustain trade unionists and trade unions as a result of a legislative framework. We prospered in an environment when card-based certification was available to every worker.

Let's understand who most needs card-based certification: the most vulnerable workers. I've been proud to stand in the streets of Niagara Falls with leadership and membership, hotel workers in the city of Niagara Falls, women and men, many of them new Canadians, many of them still more functional in their homeland language than in the English language, working for the lowest of wages and doing the hardest and most dangerous of work, who have, oh, the audacity, according to some here, to want to be able to collectively bargain. How arrogant of these workers, they would say, to want to exercise a charter right of freedom of assembly. How arrogant and audacious of these workers to want to be able to go home, maybe more tired, but at least as healthy as they were when they left in the morning with limbs intact, their eyesight still working.

This is a fundamental issue of basic decency, of very basic human rights. I, for one, will never abandon my passion for the right of workers to have some control over their workplaces. So understand, to deny workers the right to card-based certification is to deny them the right to unionization; to deny them the right to unionization is to deny them the right of free and fair collective bargaining.

Let's make no mistake about it. Yes, there's a broad range of what constitutes free and fair collective bargaining, it also constitutes the right to strike. I say that people who turn down workers' rights to freedom of assembly are turning down one of the very basic cornerstones of a democratic society.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I'm delighted to be able to take part in this debate today. I've done a lot of research since 1996 on the construction industry, especially when I introduced Bill 60 way back in 1996. Bill 60 was called Fairness is a Two-Way Street Act, which referred at the time to the Ontario-Quebec labour mobility agreement. But I remember afterwards, in early 2000, that the previous government came up with Bill 17, again because they could see there was a major problem in the construction industry.

We all know that the construction industry is the backbone of our economy. The McGuinty government has

always promoted stable labour relations and economic prosperity by implementing legislation that ensures fairness and choice in Ontario's workplaces. We have restored the principles of balance, fairness and choice in Ontario's labour relations, giving all players confidence in the system that creates the stability necessary to ensure the ongoing prosperity of the province. We know that productive labour relations are key to economic growth, productivity and prosperity and give Ontario a competitive advantage.

Bill 144, the Labour Relations Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005, restored power to the Ontario Labour Relations Board to let it effectively handle situations where an employer or a union violates labour law during an organizing campaign. The Ontario Labour Relations Board now has the power to order automatic certification where it determines an employer's violation of the Labour Relations Act has made it unlikely that the employees' true wishes will be reflected in the certification vote. The board also has the power to dismiss a union certification application where it determines the union's violation of the Labour Relations Act has made it unlikely that the employees' true wishes will be reflected.

Bill 7, introduced by the Conservatives in 1995, provides that unions could be certified only where a majority of employees in the proposed bargaining unit had voted in favour of the union in a representation vote. A union could no longer be certified solely on the basis of union membership cards. Union membership cards were still relevant; however, in establishing a union's entitlement to a representation vote, the board ordered a vote where at least 40% of employees signed cards at the time the application was made.

Bill 144, introduced in 2004, reintroduced card-based certification, but only for the construction sector. As I mentioned earlier, construction is the backbone of the Ontario economy. It is my firm belief that to insist on the certification of all of our construction workers would inevitably result in the collapse of the industry. Why am I saying this? I've done all the research in Ontario, in Canada and in the United States. We would not like to see our construction industry going through a crucial period of time like the United States is doing.

Let me mention some of the information received during my research. The Ontario Home Builders' Association employs over 300,000 people; 4,200 member companies are organized into a network of the 29 local provincial associations. Ontario's largest industry's contribution is over $33 billion to the economy. That represents 5.1% of Ontario's GDP; the automotive industry represents 4%. I just want to give you an example. It generates over $6 billion in provincial and federal taxes, premiums and charges; $1 billion goes to development charges in municipalities. In addition, the Ontario Home Builders' Association built over 80% of new housing in Ontario. According to the Ottawa Carleton Home Builders Association, of over 25,000 construction workers in eastern Ontario from Kingston to the Quebec border, 95% are not certified; only 5% are certified construction workers. Most of them learn their trade on the job and they produce quality work. At the present time, there are 10 compulsory trades, 22 voluntary trades, and 104 non-restricted trades. To me, the system works as it is. There is no need to change it.

The Ottawa Carleton Home Builders Association has sent me this document. According to information received from the organized labour force, to defend their position that certified workers are better for the construction industry. They say it provides better quality of work. But, to me, the quality of work is no better, whether the workers are certified or not, according to the data from other provinces.

1140

Reductions in the number of accidents: Well, I have all the data here. According to the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada, Ontario has 669,000 more workers than Quebec, for example. In Quebec, we all know that all construction trades have to be certified, so how come they have 669,000 fewer construction workers than we have and they have 1,287 more accidents?

Mr. Peter Kormos: You haven't read the bill.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Yes, I have.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Jean-Marc, you don't understand the debate. You've read the wrong bill. You're reading the wrong notes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order, the member from Welland.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: At the moment, the issue is not the lack of post-secondary training but certified construction workers in Ontario. Yet, 44% of the construction workforce is over 65 years of age. There is already a shortage of skilled labour in Ontario.

The problem at the present time in Ontario is the ratios. When I look at all the other provinces in Ontario, why is it—and even though organized labour is saying that there's no shortage of labour, anybody who is graduating from the colleges at the present time cannot find a job, even though I received just this week a publication saying they are congratulating the students who have become apprentices under the apprenticeship programs. When I look at the other provinces, most of them are 1 to 1. Even in Alberta, which has a shortage of labour at the present time, it's 1 to 2. And here, for a carpenter, it's 4 to 1. You've got to have four tradesmen for one apprentice in Ontario. That has to be changed. There is no use, at the present time, in expanding our training colleges because the unions are not recognizing those apprentices.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Stop the clock for a moment.

The Chair is pleased to introduce Mr. Bob Huget, who is in the east gallery. He was the member for Sarnia in the 35th Parliament.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to take this opportunity to rise here today and to speak to the member from Kenora–Rainy River's bill, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to certification of trade

unions. I want to speak to this bill as someone who has owned a company, but also as someone who has been and currently is a member of a trade union. As a matter of fact, I've held a card in the union of which I'm a member for 35 years and am happy to hold it again today. I even have strike experience under my belt.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They might pull it after today.

Mr. Peter Shurman: They might.

This is certainly an opportunity to tell you that my experiences are varied. We bring our experiences to this House and hopefully use them to contribute to the debate. It's not an issue, for me, of being against trade unions or the ideals that they bring to society, but other experiences temper my views.

What I'd like to discuss, because it has a great bearing on the member's bill, is experience that I had in my own company, which speaks directly to this bill and goes back approximately 10 years, maybe a little bit less. We had, in a company that I owned with one other person, a certification attempt at that time. The union was well aware that it was operating outside of its sphere of influence. The typical members of the union were skilled trades who worked manually with their hands in industry, particularly in construction. My employees, meanwhile, were white-collar employees who worked as service workers. The union wanted to expand its base, which is its right. One or two—at most—disgruntled employees in my company got caught up in the union's drive. It began as a drive to elicit signatures, as this bill describes. My couple of disgruntled employees, along with paid union workers, lay in wait for my employees to come and go to the buses, subways and cars that transported them to and from their jobs on a daily basis. The employees were continually pressured and they were coerced to sign. They did sign; 45% to 50% of them signed cards. I, as owner of the company, paid out tens of thousands of dollars to ensure—and this is in legal fees—that I was acting legally and to ensure that the other side did likewise.

I used absolutely no coercion of any sort to influence my employees in terms of which way to vote. So I continued to act legally, not using any coercion, and guess what? On secret ballot—and I emphasize that: on secret ballot—the employee group voted 90 to 10 against unionization. Why did they do that? Because they got a fair wage, well above the minimum wage, because they worked in good white-collar jobs, they got good benefits, they got good pensions and they liked where they were. Many are still employed by that company today.

A secret ballot, no coercion; the two equate. I learned again that democratic principles always apply and always come to the fore. One person, one vote; secret ballot. Why? Because this is the only guarantee that we're all operating in a pressure-free environment and that we're all able to vote our conscience. If you implement a threshold system, that goes out the window.

My friend the member from Welland—and I'm paraphrasing—said, "It's never, ever wrong to make a fair wage. It's never, ever wrong to get a fair pension. It's never, ever wrong to get good benefits." But he presupposes that only unions can secure those things. How arrogant to make those assumptions.

The proposed amendment has many potential flaws, and I'm especially concerned with clause 8(4)(b), which states:

"Upon receiving an application for certification, the board shall,...

"(b) direct that a representation vote be taken or certify the trade union as the bargaining agent of the employees in the bargaining unit, if it is satisfied that more than 55 per cent of the employees in the bargaining unit are members of the trade union on the date on which the application is made."

When I take that into consideration and I project backwards to that incident that I described in my own experience, in my own company, we came dangerously close to that level, and yet when the vote went secret, it was 90 to 10 against a union. What does that say? It says that this clause opens the door to threats and coercion and it slams the door on democracy. It slams the door on a private, secret ballot.

The "D" in NDP stands for "democratic," and I know that you all believe it in the third party. This sort of clause could encourage some unscrupulous labour organizers—and they do exist—to exert undue pressure on potential members of the bargaining unit. I saw this with my own eyes. The clause designed to protect against this is toothless, and that's why, even if 100% of people signed cards, it should still be a secret vote.

Subsection 8(7) states in part, "If the trade union or person acting on behalf of the trade union contravenes this act ... the board may, on the application of an interested person, dismiss the application if no other remedy, including a representation vote, would be sufficient to counter the effects of the contravention."

That means that if one lone person fights the good fight, opens up the door, he becomes what is commonly referred to as the goat, the guy who has the guts but gets the snot kicked out of him for having the guts. This provides little relief; it requires an employee to come forward. It requires an employee to publicly file a complaint against the union, and I ask the question: Realistically, who's going to do that?

If the job status of the employee filing the complaint changes, it could also affect the status of disciplinary action against the union. So you just redefine the bargaining unit or you torment the complainant—it's easy, but it's undemocratic, and at worst, it's even illegal. I cannot foresee an instance where someone would step forward and possibly have to face a year's worth of harassment just for coming forward against a union, and this aspect begs for any and all manner of illegal action.

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Subsection (8) bars unions from reapplying for a period of one year as a potential penalty for violations of the aforementioned subsections. The clauses I'm talking about here are basically escape hatches. If you harass someone enough, he'll go away, and that changes the

composition of the bargaining unit. He'll get other employment, presto. Now the union can go ahead and reapply, and that's not what we are looking for.

I can't possibly foresee an instance where someone would step forward under these circumstances. I believe workers should have the right to bargain collectively, and I also believe that workers have a right to reasonable wages and benefits. I also believe that a vast majority of the businesses across this province do value and respect their employees, as did I. I can tell you that if my employees were here to speak today and make deputations, they would say the same thing, because they recognize that their employer was a good employer and the vast majority of employees in good businesses, which are the majority of businesses in our province, recognize that they are responsible for the success and failure of companies and that it's a two-way street. They deserve this mutuality.

Today, we're talking about a piece of legislation that will force any potential investors to reconsider Ontario for fear of being unionized without even the benefit of a certification vote. We've been listening in this House for the past number of weeks to talk of the economy, and no doubt we'll be talking about it as debate continues today, as we look at job losses in Oshawa at General Motors of 1,000, Campbell Soup, 500, Chatham, 130, and the hits just keep on coming. We don't need any more of it. This is not the time to consider looking at unionization without the ability of the democratic process to be followed.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's certainly my pleasure to rise today on May Day, the international day of solidarity with workers, to speak in favour of this private member's bill that would guarantee card-based certification for all workers in the province of Ontario—not a radical change, in fact something that workers had a right to in this province for many, many years, except it was the government of the day back in 1995-96, I believe, that got rid of that right, and that was a horrible day for workers in Ontario.

Today, we have with us in this chamber—and I think it's important to note—many, many trade union activists. We have many labour leaders I wanted to mention. We have Wayne Samuelson, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour; Dave Ritchie from IAMAW, Wayne Fraser, United Steelworkers of America, Wayne Hanley, UFCW—all of our important labour leaders here and all of the people who are active in the labour movement who could get here today to show solidarity, not only with workers in Toronto and here in Ontario but with workers around the world, because international labour movement activists around this world, some 122 years ago, fought for the eight-hour day.

The struggles of workers, as was mentioned earlier in the speech by my colleague from Welland, Mr. Kormos, were difficult struggles, and those struggles were based on a fundamental difference between the interests, the attitudes—the deeply polarized attitudes in fact back in those days. I would submit that, today, those polarized attitudes still exist. They exist, unfortunately, in some workplaces, but they exist right here in this chamber, I would submit: those polarized attitudes between the rights of workers, the dignity of workers, the assurances that workers should have in a democratic society to enable them to gain a decent wage for their labour, to ensure that their workplaces are safe and healthy, to ensure that at the end of their working life they might have a little bit of a pension to be able to rely on so that they're not living in poverty, versus those who would not see those things as rights or obligations of a civil society at all.

Back then, those struggles were very difficult and people, yes, were killed back in 1886 in the Haymarket riots. But in this chamber today we have the same division. We have the same polarization: the Liberals and Conservatives on one side who don't want to see those rights of workers reinstated in the province of Ontario, and New Democrats who on May Day, the international day of solidarity with workers, are here to say we absolutely want to see this law in place in Ontario.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again, this is a very clarified moment in this chamber. In case there's any doubt out there in the province of Ontario about the party that stands up for workers' rights and for workers' justice, there is only one party that does: the New Democratic Party of Ontario. It's not the Liberal Party, although some may think that it does, but clearly they don't. They don't support this private member's bill. They do not stand up for workers. We knew the Tories didn't, but we are shocked to see that the people across the hall—the government, the Premier and the Premier's office—do not stand up for workers' rights. This has been made clear this morning.

Let us make no mistake about this: Whatever facilitates unionization, facilitates human dignity; whatever facilitates the rights of workers, facilitates all humans to a more dignified life.

My husband and I had a wonderful opportunity to go to Sweden, a community of nine million—85% unionization rate. They have free tuition for post-secondary, they have child care free to all who need it, they have free dental care up to the age of 18, and they have a vibrant economy. They have Sony Ericsson, Volvo, Ikea and others. You can have both—and a de facto minimum wage of $12 an hour. That's what human dignity looks like. That's what this province could look like if this private member's bill was passed. That's what this province would look like if the Liberals didn't stand in the way, if the Tories didn't stand in the way, if we stood up for workers' rights and elected more New Democratic Party members to this House.

M. Gilles Bisson: Je veux seulement applaudir ce projet de loi et dire que c'est à peu près temps qu'on vote pour les travailleurs de cette province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Hampton, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Howard Hampton: In the time that I have left, I would like to respond, in particular to some of the arguments that were raised by government members. I

find the government's position bizarre. Members of the government say that you have to have card certification in the construction sector because the construction sector is dynamic, because some people may be working some days and, a week later, the workforce may change. I invite government members to go into the hospitality sector, the retail sector or the food sector and look at the young workers and overwhelmingly visible minority women who work in those sectors and tell them that their workplace is any less dynamic. Tell them that their workplace is any more steady or regular. It's not. It's bizarre that government members would say that young workers, new Canadians, and women who work in some of the most dynamic parts of our economy—where they're on call, where they're working different shifts, where they're working some days 10 hours, then two days not working, then called in on the weekend—that somehow their workplace is any less dynamic, any more regular than a construction work site. Baloney.

The second point I'd like to make: There's been some talk about democracy. In our society, if I sign a cheque, no one comes around to conduct an inquiry. My signature on the cheque is okay. I have a driver's licence and my signature is on it. I don't have to go through an inquiry. My signature is okay. But yet when it comes to workers who want to join a trade union, they seem to have to exercise democracy twice: Sign the union card and then go vote. If it's good enough on my cheque and on my credit card—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

We will first deal with ballot item number 17, standing in the name of Mr. Yakabuski.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT ACT (ASSISTANCE TO MUNICIPALITIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DES VOIES PUBLIQUES ET DES TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN (AIDE AUX MUNICIPALITÉS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Yakabuski has moved second reading of Bill 38, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to the assistance that the Minister provides to municipalities. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will defer the vote until we deal with the second ballot item.

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (CERTIFICATION), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (ACCRÉDITATION)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Hampton has moved second reading of Bill 65, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to certification of trade unions. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT ACT (ASSISTANCE TO MUNICIPALITIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DES VOIES PUBLIQUES ET DES TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN (AIDE AUX MUNICIPALITÉS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those in favour of the motion will please rise.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Barrett, Toby	Kormos, Peter	Shurman, Peter
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Paul	Yakabuski, John
Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia	
Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Prue, Michael
Broten, Laurel C.	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Carroll, Aileen	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Chan, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	Marchese, Rosario	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	Mitchell, Carol	Wilkinson, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 22; the nays are 39.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The doors will be opened for 30 seconds.

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (CERTIFICATION), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (ACCRÉDITATION)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Bisson, Gilles	Hampton, Howard	Miller, Paul
Craitor, Kim	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Tabuns, Peter
Gélinas, France	Marchese, Rosario	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Hardeman, Ernie	Pendergast, Leeanna
Albanese, Laura	Hoy, Pat	Rinaldi, Lou
Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.
Arthurs, Wayne	Jaczek, Helena	Ruprecht, Tony
Bailey, Robert	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Balkissoon, Bas	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Shurman, Peter
Carroll, Aileen	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Chan, Michael	MacLeod, Lisa	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Mangat, Amrit	Sterling, Norman W.
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Miller, Norm	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	Witmer, Elizabeth
Elliott, Christine	Moridi, Reza	Yakabuski, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Munro, Julia	
Gerretsen, John	Naqvi, Yasir	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 11; the nays are 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

All matters related to private members' public business having been completed, I do now leave the chair, and the House will resume at 1:30 p.m.

The House recessed from 1213 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WORLD CATHOLIC EDUCATION DAY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to recognize World Catholic Education Day. In Canada alone, Catholic schools educate almost one million students. The theme for Ontario's Catholic Education Week is "We are called," and today's special theme is "To serve generously."

As the member for Burlington, I would like to recognize the tremendous accomplishments of two students in our community: Jasmine Berlingieri from St. Patrick School, and Jordana Baumgartner from Holy Rosary School, who received top honours in a recent Halton Catholic District School Board public speaking contest.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the recipients of the 2008 Sharing the Spirit Award of Excellence: Emma Harper, Robert Babic, Marisa Norris, Sarah Bourque, Nadia Mendola, Stephanie Kovacs, Sean Madden, Rachel Gubbels, Olivia Brown, Andrew van Kooten, Rachael Plume, Helen Kosterman, Kailey Meehan, Emily O'Keefe and Nicole Veloce. All of these young students have distinguished themselves amongst their peers as leaders and dedicated ambassadors of Catholic education.

I wish each one of them all the best as they pursue their dreams, challenge their minds and open their hearts to new and exciting opportunities.

OIL SPRINGS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: A century and a half ago, James Miller Williams, in search of a better quality of drinking water, dug a well in the village of Oil Springs, just south of Petrolia. Mr. Williams was not able to find any water, but what he did discover was to become the first commercial oil well in North America. Four years later, in 1862, there were more than 2,000 barrels of oil a day shooting above the treetops from about 100 gushers in Lambton county.

I rise in the House today to tell all members of the Legislature that Canada Post will be unveiling a commemorative stamp in Oil Springs tomorrow afternoon at 4 o'clock to recognize the 150th anniversary of this first discovery of oil. Prior to 2007's riding redistribution, Oil Springs was in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Along with the former Minister of Culture, Caroline Di Cocco, the McGuinty government supported Oil Springs as they prepared to ready the village for the year-long celebration. Among those grants was the announcement last spring of $225,000 for retrofits and improvements to the Oil Museum of Canada as part of our government's economic stimulus package. I had the pleasure of working with Mayor Gordon Perry and his community as they started their planning and continued to watch with interest as this small community rallied around to ensure that the spit and polish is on this showcase of commercial oil history.

I encourage everyone today to partake in this appropriately named village's celebration and make sure that you enjoy the down-home hospitality.

ETHEL GARDINER

Mr. Ted Arnott: In June 2007, students, teachers and the Halton District School Board lost a dear friend and champion of public education. Ethel Gardiner, a long-serving trustee and former school board chair, brought her passion, kindness, commitment and outstanding

leadership to her every task. Ethel fostered excellence in our schools by recognizing publicly the achievements of others, including students, educators and support staff. Her focus on student achievement was surely instrumental in her being awarded the prestigious provincial Dr. Harry Paikin Award of Merit.

I was honoured to meet Ethel towards the end of her tenure as a school board trustee. After making my decision to seek re-election in Wellington–Halton Hills after the riding boundary changes were established, I made a point of meeting some of the community leaders in Halton Hills to get to know them and to listen to their advice. As the past school board chair, Ethel was someone I wanted to meet. I called her and we arranged to meet at what she called her office, the Tim Hortons on Mountainview Road in Georgetown. After all, that was where she met most of her constituents.

I was immediately impressed with her down-to-earth sincerity, her passion for public education, and the way she saw everyone, students and staff alike, as part of her extended family.

That's why I'm so pleased to congratulate the Halton District School Board for its decision to name the new school under construction in south Georgetown after Ethel Gardiner. There is no more appropriate name and no more fitting person in Halton Hills to be honoured in this way.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: For the last several weeks, I have stood in this Legislature and asked questions of various ministers and the Premier about poverty consultation—when all of that is going to begin, who's going to be invited and what's going to be said. I've been stonewalled at every single instance. No one has been willing to answer this.

You can imagine my surprise and chagrin this morning when I opened up the clippings and saw in the Peterborough Examiner that the member from Peterborough, Mr. Leal, has announced that the long-awaited consultations will begin on Monday in Peterborough. Of course, I instantly wanted to go. So I phoned up the local council and said, "How can I attend? Where is it?" We got a very curt reply that they couldn't invite us because only the minister could invite people to attend.

So we phoned the minister's office and said, "Please, Madam Minister, how can we get an invitation to go to Peterborough and hear these consultations?" Of course, the minister's office has not called us back.

I have to say that people have been asking—the 25 in 5 coalition, all of the groups, this side of the House—when it's going to begin, who's going to be listened to, what's going to be said, and now we find out: by invitation of the minister only, in a secret location that can't be revealed, with people invited who are going to tell the minister what I assume she wants to hear. This is hardly consultation.

SQUARE ONE FARMERS' MARKET

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: All across Ontario, shoppers are choosing farmers' markets for nature's best produce, where the food is fresh, high in quality and the next best thing to harvesting it yourself.

The Square One Farmers' Market in Mississauga was started in 1975 by the Mississauga Central Lions Club, whose members volunteer to help raise funds for the less fortunate in Mississauga.

Farmers' markets support local farmers by promoting locally produced goods in a healthy and eco-friendly manner. To date, the farmers' market at Square One has generated approximately $5 million for the Mississauga Central Lions Club, which in turn funds local community projects.

I would like to acknowledge and congratulate Manuel Castellino, chairman and general manager, and Edward Bujold, assistant manager of the Square One Farmers' Market, on their success. Both of them are in the east members' gallery today. I would also like to thank the management of Square One Shopping Centre for their continuing support of this great farmers' market.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF SIMCOE COUNTY

Mr. Jim Wilson: Last week, my colleague from Simcoe North and I had a very informative meeting with representatives from the Simcoe county children's aid society. I wanted to bring to the attention of this House a very exciting project that the society is undertaking this weekend.

On Saturday, the society will plant a tree for every child in its care with its "tree for a child" greening initiative. In an effort to raise a bit of money for the foundation, the society is asking for community members to sponsor a tree for $5, which will be planted by staff, family members, foster families and community volunteers. These seedlings will be planted around the children's aid society building in Barrie, with each seedling representing one of the children in their care.

This tree-planting initiative is intended to symbolize the vision that the children's aid society has for our children, including healthy growth and development, and the support and nurturing that each child requires to achieve their full potential. It's also an important fundraiser for the society as it struggles to deal with a $400,000 funding shortfall from the last fiscal year.

I think this is a fantastic initiative, and I want to thank all of the staff and volunteers with the Simcoe county children's aid society for doing their part for the environment and for being the compassionate and thoughtful community advocates they are.

The planting begins at noon on Saturday at the society's Bell Farm Road office in Barrie, and it will be followed by a barbecue and children's games.

I just say to all members, if you want to support children in care and children's aid in Barrie, please give me $5.

1340

ANNIVERSARY OF POLISH CONSTITUTION

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: A very momentous occasion took place in Poland in 1791, and that was the establishment of the Polish Constitution, which for the first time in the history of Europe, at least, separated the judiciary branch from legislative and executive branches of government. In addition to that, it gave a lot of power to the people.

Little did the writers know in 1791 what the impact of this very important constitution would be on the rest of Europe—on the French Revolution, in Germany, in Italy. Basically, all the constitutions in Europe and even the Constitution of the United States were affected by this.

In 1791, the Polish people did not know what awaited them. When we raise the flag on May 3, which is this Saturday, I would like to invite all members to come and join us. When we raise the flag, we are reminded of the history of the Polish nation being oppressed, and being sacrificed and divided over 200 or 300 years. Today it's a free nation. The people of Poland, from one generation to the next, have passed the flame of freedom on to the children today.

Finally, let me say that as we raise the flag on Saturday, we are reminded of three items: one, the constitution; two, the tremendous contribution of the Polish people in Canada; and three, the 150th anniversary of Polish immigration to Canada.

GUELPH DAY

Mrs. Liz Sandals: As you know, today is Guelph Day in the provincial Legislature. I would like to welcome Mayor Karen Farbridge, various councillors, representatives from the University of Guelph and Conestoga College, and business leaders to the Legislature today, and to congratulate them for organizing such a successful day. I hope that all the members were able to join these individuals for a delicious Guelph-style lunch today.

The city of Guelph is the agrifood capital of Ontario and a true environmental leader. The city of Guelph shares a unique relationship with the agriculture sector. This was demonstrated earlier this week, when Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Minister Leona Dombrowsky visited my riding to announce a new 10-year research and education partnership with the University of Guelph. This announcement allocates $300 million over the next five years to continue the type of top-notch agrifood research that resulted in the omega-3 egg.

This funding adds to the $56 million in one-time funding that was announced in the 2008 provincial budget. In addition to the traditional areas, the new agreement will focus on commercialization of research and new uses for agricultural products.

U of G's BioCar project, to which the province contributed $17.9 million, and the city's innovative community energy plan will surely cement Guelph's future as a leader in biotechnology and environmental sustainability.

HAMILTON ECONOMIC SUMMIT

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: This morning, I had the honour of attending the first-ever Hamilton economic summit, which was held at the Ancaster Old Mill. Over 120 community leaders have gathered to work together on the economic vision and future prosperity of Hamilton. I am so proud to be part of a community that takes such a proactive approach to its economic goals and works together to achieve those goals.

Hamilton is a major transportation hub, with the third-busiest port on the Great Lakes, the number one cargo airport in Canada, and a road and rail infrastructure that reaches 120 million customers within one day's truck travel. We are also a world leader in health care, with top-quality research and innovation, as well as having first-class educational institutions like Mohawk College and McMaster University.

I would like to congratulate the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, and I would like to applaud all the attendees at today's summit for their dedication to achieve their vision of making Hamilton the best city in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities. It is innovative and resourceful initiatives such as this that will keep this province strong and successful.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 35, Loi autorisant le ministre des Finances à faire des versements aux bénéficiaires admissibles sur les crédits affectés par la Législature et modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la transparence et la responsabilité financières, la Loi sur le ministère du Trésor et de l'Économie et la Loi de 1991 sur le Conseil du Trésor.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1346 to 1351.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Gravelle, Michael	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Kwinter, Monte	Sousa, Charles
Chan, Michael	Levac, Dave	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	Mangat, Amrit	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	Matthews, Deborah	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	Moridi, Reza	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Shurman, Peter
Elliott, Christine	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Gélinas, France	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 45; the nays are 23.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the report adopted.

Report adopted.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to welcome a number of guests to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the member from Nickel Belt: Patrick Imbeau, Eric Blondin, Daniel Mayer, and Patrick Roome, in the west members' gallery. These are students with the francophone student association.

On behalf of the member from Northumberland–Quinte West, we'd like to welcome Mr. and Mrs. Aziz, in the west members' gallery.

On behalf of the member from Guelph, a number of guests today in the west members' gallery: Her Worship Karen Farbridge; June Hofland, Ian Findlay, Kathleen Farrelly, Vicki Beard, and Lise Burcher, councillors from the city of Guelph; Hans Loewig, Janet Laird, Peter Cartwright, and Barb Maly, senior staff from the city of Guelph; Lloyd Longfield, president of the Guelph Chamber of Commerce; Jasmine Urisk, president, JTU Consulting Inc.; Ken Hammill, Friends of Guelph; and Brenda Boisvert, Kate Sullivan, Tara Sprigg and Caroline Pinto from the city of Guelph.

We'll be having a class visiting in a few moments: the grade 5 students from the Scott Street school in my community of St. Thomas. I certainly want to recognize two friends of mine who are in that classroom, Brian Mason and Amy Nickson.

On behalf of pages who have guests visiting us today: in the east members' gallery, page Dario Toman—his sister Maya and his mother Alexandra Gilisic. On behalf of page Cali Van Bommel, in the Speaker's gallery, her mother Suzanne and her sister Maria. On behalf of page Thomas Parker, in the east public gallery, his father, Al Parker.

As well, visiting the Legislature today is former member Don Cousens, member from York Centre in the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments and from Markham in the 34th and 35th Parliaments.

I have some housekeeping to do on the previous report that we just passed.

Pursuant to the standing order of the House dated April 22, 2008, Bill 35 is now ordered for third reading.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Michael Bryant: Mr. Speaker, I'm seeking unanimous consent for debate on government notice of motion number 81 to be limited to one hour, with 20 minutes being allotted to each of the recognized parties. At the end of the debate, the Speaker shall put the question without any further debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader seeks unanimous consent. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that the December 11, 2007, order of the House establishing the committee schedule for the 39th Parliament be rescinded and substituted by the following:

The Standing Committee on Justice Policy may meet on Thursday mornings to 10:45 a.m. and Thursday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Social Policy may meet on Monday and Tuesday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on General Government may meet on Monday and Wednesday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs may meet on Thursday mornings to 10:45 a.m. and Thursday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Estimates may meet on Tuesday mornings to 10:45 a.m. and Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Government Agencies may meet on Tuesday mornings to 10:45 a.m.

The Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly may meet on Wednesday afternoons to routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts may meet on Wednesday mornings to 10:45 a.m. and Wednesday afternoons to routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills may meet on Wednesday mornings to 10:45 a.m.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Bryant has moved government notice of motion number 81. Mr. Bryant.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm not going to take the full 20 minutes. I'm just going to say that this is a debate about the schedule for committee meetings, which ordinarily is a matter of fine-tuning adjustments. This is not. This follows from the reforms that are being proposed and will be tested and reviewed over the course of the summer by a standing committee. As I know members know, right now, standing committees meet during debates, for example, between after question period through to the end—5:45, 6 o'clock.

Because the House will also be debating matters in the mornings, this means that committees will be able to meet in the mornings during those times as well. Obviously, committees won't be meeting during question—

Interjection.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member will have an opportunity to speak for 20 minutes on this if he wishes.

The committees, obviously, will not be taking place during question period or during routine proceedings.

If there be co-operation with these committee meeting hearings or the testing of these parliamentary reforms, it is a great credit to all members of this Legislature.

1400

I do thank the House leaders for our being able to accommodate some discussion around this particular matter. I know it was very important to the opposition and the third party, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this matter.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: We intend to be brief in our response, but I'm going to be joined by Mr. Hudak and Mrs. Munro, who are also Chairs of standing committees of this Legislature.

I am the Chair of the public accounts committee—

Hon. John Gerretsen: And a good one.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: "And a good one," my colleague from across says.

Part of the problem with placing question period at the time of day that has been chosen is that it splits up the day into unmanageable time frames. There's too little at the front—in other words, from 9 o'clock to 10:45—and the rest of the days are sort of chopped up into little pieces. Those committees, like the public accounts committee, which have hearings with people who are very, very busy—the public accounts committee traditionally asks the deputy minister of a ministry to come forward to our committee and they normally comply, because of the importance of the auditor's report and the response to that report and the questioning of the committee.

The practice of my committee now is to meet on Thursday mornings, from 9 a.m. to as late as 1 p.m., before our proceedings here start under the present structure of this place. Under the calendar that is in this motion for my committee, we have the option of sitting from 9 in the morning to 10:45, which is an hour and 45 minutes. That is not long enough to carry on our deliberations, from front to back. Then we are given the option of sitting from 12 noon to 3 p.m., before routine proceedings start on Wednesday afternoon. The problem with that time frame is that it may be too short to deal with the witnesses that we deal with on a normal matter that we are concerned with.

We also did not have the opportunity to meet with the other committee chairs, nor did the subcommittees have an opportunity to have their say, let alone the committee members, in terms of the flexibility of where our time slot was going to be in this calendar. Our committee did discuss this this morning and we have come to an interim arrangement on this, but we don't know yet how it's going to work, because we don't know whether we're going to have enough time in the afternoon to deal with witnesses. The problem with it is, if we bumped up to 3 o'clock in the afternoon when routine proceedings start on Wednesday afternoons, we would then have to ask the witnesses to sit idly by for another hour, hour and a half while routine proceedings went on in the House. The people that we're asking to come in are not only deputy ministers; they often show up with 20 staff. We feel we shouldn't be taking up their time and having them sit idly by while we're back in the Legislature. So the real crux of the problem is having question period where it is—and that.

Having accepted that, we're going to try with this particular schedule. But I do note that the government House leader has said that he will be open to changes. I hope he will also be open to changes with regard to the placing of question period in the future.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I will just take a few moments to add a few comments on this change that is being contemplated here today.

As the Chair of government agencies, I find myself and the committee in a rather strange situation, in the fact that what's been proposed here is one hour and 45 minutes. As members will know, one of the major functions of the committee is of course to have an opportunity to meet intended appointees. Each of those people is provided with up to 30 minutes to be able to make a presentation to the committee, as well as to have members of the committee provide questions and comments. So when I saw this, I looked at the fact that this obviously presents some significant logistical problems for people. We find it's often difficult for people in terms of their own scheduling to be able to be here precisely at 9 o'clock, because we are empowered to meet as early as 9 should the number of intended appointees demand that. So I, like the previous speaker, have not had the opportunity to either have a subcommittee meeting on how the committee wishes to proceed or, obviously, to speak to members of the committee on this issue.

The haste with which this process has come upon us has left committee members, and committee Chairs, ob-

viously, with some unanswered questions. Certainly, just the issue of scheduling is one that I think is most important for us to be able to do the job that we are empowered to do and which we have an obligation to this House to do in a responsible and accountable way.

Having said that, I would say that it's important to revisit some of the logistics that we have to deal with in this proposed regime.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I have the honour of serving the Legislature as the Chair of estimates. The Speaker well knows that estimates is a very detailed, thoughtful and thorough review of a given ministry's spending for the upcoming year. As such, typically and appropriately, the committee not only has the minister before it, but also the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers and directors—and appropriately so. We're talking about hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars to be allocated for various programs. Obviously, they deserve due scrutiny by members of all three parties.

Under the standing order changes before the House today in this motion, the estimates committee would move from its usual block of approximately 3:30 till 6 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday, predictably, to a new session that would see us from 9 to 10:45 and then, after routine proceedings that day, to resume until 5:45, and then I think similarly on Wednesday, an uncertain start till 5:45.

This means the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers, directors, let alone the minister and his or her entourage, would troop over to Queen's Park, answer questions for about an hour and 45 minutes, troop back, and then troop back to here for the afternoon session, which is a tremendous waste of the considerable resources the committee has available to them. Certainly, I know that the civil servants who appear before committee, which we appreciate, and answer questions would not like to be going back and forth, nor does it serve members who are trying to organize the rest of their day around meetings, interactions with stakeholders and debates.

The reality here is that if we had a fixed question period at 1 p.m., as the official opposition has called for, you could do a solid block of estimates in the morning and get it done with for the day, or a solid block after question period in the afternoon, and save the chaos that's going to ensue.

I think, sadly, the House leader's goal with this was to put question period and private members' public business at a time of day to reduce their relevance in the Legislature, and then he started to try to chockablock fit in committees wherever he could. The problem is that the resulting chaos would make Salvador Dali look positively structured.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Let's put this into some context. We know now that, as a result of the time allocation motion, the motion that will significantly alter the standing orders is entirely within the control of the government. It will decide when it's called again, and that means that it will decide when it becomes implemented.

We know that that motion requires the House to adopt the new schedule on the Monday following the passage of that motion. That means that if the motion is called today, Monday will become the effective date for the new daily and weekly schedule.

1410

Look, we see the majority here, and we've heard their resistance to our proposition around a 1 o'clock question period. Quite frankly, the disagreement around the standing order motion has been narrowed down to that very specific issue about the timing of question period. However, we understand that the government can and will pass that motion.

We received a draft of this motion that we're dealing with now, late on Tuesday. It was a draft and, quite frankly, it hadn't become an order on the order paper yet. I appreciate the advance notice, if you will. It was identified as option number 12 on the copy that I got. That implies that there were at least 11 others and maybe more, if there indeed were options 13, 14, 15 and 16. New Democrats took this position, and that is that we understand that the standing orders are going to change about the daily schedule. We understand that—9 o'clock, you bet your boots we'll be here with bells on. Count on that.

I tell you, we put to the government that it might want to delay calling the motion to revamp the standing orders for a week, so that we could spend this coming week talking about ways of accommodating committees. Committees aren't about us; they're about the public. They are about people from across Ontario and beyond, who give of their time and expertise and come to Queen's Park to try to make the process and the end result a little better.

It's not just the committees. There is a whole staff here at Queen's Park whose workday is going to be significantly altered. They know that it's coming, but my concern is that it doesn't appear that the backroom people who have been proposing these changes have thought very much about those folks. We have a library staff who show up very early in the morning—at what time, 5:30?—to cull newspaper items that are of relevance to members, their staff and others here at Queen's Park. They already start at 5:30 in the morning, and even at that, have a hard time getting this material out by 9.

Now, ministers have got staff coming out of their proverbial yingyangs that cull newspapers—Mr. Kwinter is smiling because he knows this is the case—that develop these same clippings for cabinet ministers. Again, I don't begrudge a cabinet minister that material. It's important that a cabinet minister be abreast of things that are in the news.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, it is. It's a very responsible job. It's important that they be abreast of things that have occurred not just provincially but nationally and internationally, and aware of how they're impacting on people. That's why they get these materials.

I'm concerned about the pressure that this puts on the library staff. I'm concerned about what kind of pressure

this puts on the Legislative Assembly broadcast people. We are effectively extending their day, too. I've got no quarrel with that, but then you'd better count on adding staffing to the legislative broadcast staff.

I don't know what concern there has been about the pages and their days, and how their days are going to be structured to accommodate. These young people are the jewels of this Parliament, I tell you. Well, they are. But I'm concerned that there's been little thought about how they're going to be accommodated, in terms of their classroom obligations and their duties in the House that are going to start at 9 o'clock and go through to 6.

We were eager—both the Conservatives and New Democrats—to sit down and try to hammer out a committee schedule that would accommodate folks who come to Queen's Park as residents of Ontario, as concerned citizens, as engaged citizens to participate in, I put to you, the most important part of the parliamentary process in the broadest sense.

I regret that the government hasn't wanted to sit down and talk about the at least 11 other options, or even provide us with them. And I regret that there is an apparent inability on the part of the government, perhaps a pathological inability, to work with the opposition parties, when the opposition parties have made it clear that, having read the writing on the wall, they know what the reality is going to be and now want to address and assist in accommodating as many people as possible. The government hasn't seen itself able to engage in those kinds of discussions.

There was, I tell you, a paucity of discussion around the standing orders motion itself. If that is considered by some on the government side as negotiation, then I empathize with any number of bodies across the province with whom this government purports to be negotiating. It also reveals very clearly why the government has been so distinctly unsuccessful at resolving any number of disputes that they purport to address by way of negotiation.

The Leader of the Opposition was going to refer to this as a dog's breakfast. I said, "Nuts, Bob, I was going to use that line." But then I realized that in fact this is a far different product of a dog's alimentary canal.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: We are not supporting this proposal. This is knee-jerk. It's not just not well thought out; it's thoughtless. It fails to address the issue. One wonders: Could this government organize a drunk-up in a brewery? They seem to have failed to put together even some of the most simple pieces, and we're talking about a preschooler's puzzle. We're not talking about one of those great, big things that fill the kitchen table; we're talking about the one with five blocks that you've got to fit together, maybe a four-piece puzzle with Snoopy on it. But the government fails to put together even some of the most basic pieces.

This is a government that is not serving the public well. They're serving themselves well, or they think they are. Let's make no mistake about this: Governments don't do these sorts of things to benefit the opposition; governments do these things to benefit themselves. I understand that, Mr. Hudak understands that, Mr. Prue understands that and Ms. Gélinas understands it. I suspect that Angelo Kontos, sitting up in the gallery with his students from Rick Hansen Secondary School, understands it too, because he has been a Queen's Park observer since he was a journalist as a student at York University.

We reject this proposal, because you could have done better, friends. You could have done much better, and you simply chose not to. I find that truly regrettable. You could have deferred implementation of the rules by not calling the motion, now time allocated for a week, so that we could spend a week talking about these things and trying to work out the wrinkles—and there are profound wrinkles in this proposal.

One becomes cynical, I suppose, and even suspicious about whether this government is not only trying to marginalize and diminish the chamber, but whether it's also trying to marginalize and diminish public hearings. That is something about which this government should have no pride whatsoever.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Bryant has moved government notice of motion number 81. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1420 to 1425.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time to be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Pendergast, Leeanna
Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Phillips, Gerry
Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Rinaldi, Lou
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Ruprecht, Tony
Best, Margarett	Gravelle, Michael	Sandals, Liz
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Sergio, Mario
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sousa, Charles
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Takhar, Harinder S.
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Van Bommel, Maria
Carroll, Aileen	Mangat, Amrit	Watson, Jim
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Wilkinson, John
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Craitor, Kim	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	
Dhillon, Vic	Moridi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia
Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce
Elliott, Christine	Kormos, Peter	Scott, Laurie
Gélinas, France	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Hampton, Howard	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 52; the nays are 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member for Mississauga–Streetsville, I just want to take this opportunity to introduce a class that has arrived, the grades 11 and 12 from Rick Hansen Secondary School in Mississauga, and now my class has arrived, the grade 5 students from Scott Street Public School in the great community of St. Thomas. Welcome, guys.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. Once again today, it has to do with the impending attainment of have-not status for the province, an embarrassing moment in this great province's history. Yesterday, when the Premier of Newfoundland, Danny Williams, was asked about Ontario's economic plight, he said Newfoundland is prepared "to help our weaker sisters." That's where you and your taxing, spending and regulatory policies have brought this great province. We now have the Newfoundland Premier describing Ontario as a weaker sister. What's next, Ontario jokes? Are you proud of this legacy?

1430

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know Danny Williams. Danny Williams is a friend of mine—at least I thought he was. He's got a wonderful sense of humour, but the leader of the official opposition raises an important matter.

He's going to work as hard as he can now to lay squarely at my feet responsibility for everything that is happening to our economy. To a certain extent, that's his job, but I just don't think Ontarians see our world that way. I think they understand the impact of the price of oil. I think they understand the impact of the high loonie. I think they understand the impact of a sluggish US economy on our economy; they are our single largest trading partner by far.

I think, as well, they understand that we've got a great plan in place, that we will continue to work as hard as we can with Ontarians to deliver on that plan and turn this economy around so it grows even stronger.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The official opposition recognizes that there are external factors impacting the North American economy, but we'd like to see the Premier accept any degree of responsibility for the state of the economy in this province.

When you compare it with other jurisdictions within this country and North America, it's a pretty sad situation. The Premier continuously blames others for the state of the economy and washes his hands of any responsibility. He does this even in the face of advice from Dr. Roger Martin, the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity. He has advised you that this province lags behind the US states most similar to Ontario. We rank 14th out of 16 in peer jurisdictions in per capita growth.

They've told you that high business taxes hurt competitiveness, yet you apparently think you're right, Dr. Martin is wrong, and you ignore his critically important advice. Why are you continuing to do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There is no shortage of good advice when it comes to these kinds of issues, and all of it is well received. At the end of the day, we've got to make a call, though, on this side of the House to put forward a plan that we think is in keeping with both our heritage, values and our aspirations on behalf of Ontarians.

That's what our five-point plan is all about. It does include cuts to business taxes. We have eliminated capital taxes for manufacturers and others in the resource-based sectors. We've reduced it by 21% for everybody else. We're cutting business education taxes. We've matched the special capital cost allowance treatment that was put in place by the federal government. But we can't just have a one-point plan. Our economy is more complex than just that at the beginning of the 21st century.

That's why we are also investing heavily in the skills and education of our people. That's why we're investing heavily in innovation and infrastructure and in strategic partnerships with people in the business community. That makes a comprehensive, intelligent plan.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I don't think Dr. Martin would consider his critically important advice as being well received when it's continuously ignored by the government.

I think the Premier is living in a state of denial. He can't or won't see what is happening to the economy around him: 200,000 manufacturing jobs lost since 2004, 5,000 more just last month, and there are more to come. Many economists believe the province is currently in recession. We're on the verge of becoming a have-not province, a welfare province, a weak sister in Confederation.

Premier, do you honestly believe that your high taxing, high spending and excessive regulation have nothing to do with the state of our economy, that it's only external factors, someone else's fault? Is that the state of the denial you're living in, or do you accept any degree of responsibility whatsoever?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: If there's any denial going on around here, it's a denial on the part of the Conservative Party that there is a direct relationship between the $5 billion they would have us cut by way of tax cuts and the resulting deterioration in public services, whether it's health care or education, or supports for our most vulnerable.

Part of our five-point plan is to invest heavily in infrastructure. One of the things we announced earlier today, together with the federal government, is very important

when it comes to enhancing our competitiveness. We have just announced that we're going to invest, together with the federal government, in a new roadway leading to the Windsor border crossing. It's a $1.6-billion investment by 2011. It's the busiest border crossing in North America. One in four trucks travel between Canada and the US. It carries $120 billion annually. That's just one part of an extensive plan to make the kinds of investments that will enhance our productivity.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier, around Ontario's descent into have-not status. Premier, under your leadership, Ontario has gone from the economic powerhouse of Confederation to the poor cousin of Canada. And how did we earn this dubious distinction? Well, you increased taxes to now the highest on business investment in all of North America. You chased some 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs out of our province. You have brought us to be dead last in private sector job growth in all of Canada. Premier, like sad bookends at either side of TD's report, 900 jobs lost at Oshawa earlier in the week, and today we learned 320 families at Quebecor in Etobicoke have now lost their jobs. What did you do to try to save the jobs at Quebecor in Etobicoke?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It is true that we have lost some jobs, particularly in the manufacturing sector, and we will likely lose more. If there were something that I could do to prevent that from happening, believe me, I would have done it.

But overall, we are ahead by 450,000 net new jobs in the course of the past four and a half years. The member opposite says we have the highest taxes in North America, and that's just not true. Our corporate taxes are lower than all US states.

My colleague may want to pay attention to a recent report put out the Brookings Institute in Washington, DC, which says that the most important regional economy in North America is the Great Lakes state economy. There are two provinces and 12 states, and together we constitute the second-largest economy in the world. First there's the US, then there's that Great Lakes economy, then there's Japan, then there's China and then there's India. That is why we've been so careful to ensure that our corporate taxes are in fact lower than our real competitors which are south of the border, and they are.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier says "some jobs." Premier, I remind you: 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have fled the province of Ontario in the last few years alone thanks to your tax-and-spend policies.

Let me illustrate what Dalton McGuinty's have-not Ontario looks like. For families in Listowel, Ontario, a small community of several thousand people, they learned this week that Campbell Soup is letting go of 500 workers, the number one employer in that community. In Leamington, Ontario, Plastech is laying off some 150, one of the top employers in that community. And remember that last week, Dell laid off some 1,100 in your former hometown of Ottawa. I ask the Premier: How many more Dells, how many more Campbell Soups and how many more Plastechs are there going to be before you wake up and reverse course and try to stimulate job creation in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There are in fact 455,000 more jobs today than there were in 2003. One third of all national job growth has come from Ontario in the last four years. Our unemployment rate is at 6.4%, and when we first formed the government it was at 7%.

One of the challenges we have is that there are actually 100,000 jobs available today in Ontario, and many of those demand a high level of skill. We addressed that very specifically in our recent budget. There's a $1.5-billion investment in the skills and education of our people, including 20,000 new, first of their kind, long-term training opportunities to give people who have lost their jobs up to two years' training. We can cover up to $28,000 or more in costs so the people can get back on their feet and not just take the first available job but rather the job that they've been looking to get.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, the problem is, the people the Premier talks about are going to get trained and take up jobs in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, or now we hear Danny Williams's Newfoundland.

Premier, let me tell you what is happening in the province of Ontario. We're last in growth in all of Canada. The only growth area seems to be jobs in your office where you now have 72 Liberal staffers working for you, while families in Listowel, in Oshawa and in Ottawa are seeing layoffs.

1440

Premier, I ask you to speak to the families in Niagara who worked in CanGro, the families in Etobicoke who worked at Quebecor, the families in Listowel who worked at Campbell Soup, the families in Leamington who worked at Plastech, in Oshawa at GM, in Ottawa at Dell—all in crisis. They want to know how they're going to survive, how they're going to feed their families, how they're going to pay their mortgages when they are seeing more and more job losses in Dalton McGuinty's have-not Ontario.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We are eager to work with any community that has been affected by our economic downturn, to work with any worker who's lost his or her job, and do what we can to help any family that's struggling in the face of a personal economic challenge.

But we shouldn't lose sight of the big picture. The economy continues to grow. There are 455,000 net new jobs created since October 2003. In January, February and March of this year, we are ahead: net gains of 57,300 more jobs in the first three months. The private sector created 97% of those jobs. This economy continues to grow.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Yesterday's TD Economics report confirmed that Ontario's economy

is in serious decline, with the loss of over 200,000 good manufacturing jobs, and that relative to the rest of Canada, Ontario is becoming a have-not province. The Premier immediately blamed Ottawa, the other provinces, and the equalization formula for Ontario's economic decline.

My question is this: How in heaven's name does the equalization formula have anything to do with the loss of 200,000 good manufacturing jobs in Ontario and Ontario's economic decline under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The point that I made yesterday and will continue to make for quite some time is that there are a number of issues over which we have little control—I know the member opposite understands this—and that is the price of oil, the value of the loonie, and the state of the US economy. But there is another area over which I refuse to relinquish complete control, and that is how much money we turn over to the federal government. The first three act as a brake on our economic growth, but we can't tolerate the fourth.

What I'm saying is, we could do more to accelerate growth in this economy, we could move faster when it comes to investing in infrastructure, investing in our people and providing supports for our vulnerable so that they grow stronger, we could even consider the possibility of additional tax cuts for our businesses, but we can't do that if we continue to turn $20 billion over to the federal government. That's the point I'm making, and I think Ontarians agree with me on that score.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, the fact is that the McGuinty government doesn't turn over one red cent to Ottawa. Ottawa simply has the same tax rate in Ontario that it has in Manitoba and Nova Scotia.

Just a year ago you were quite happy with the equalization formula. Dalton McGuinty on March 20, 2007:

"We have made three important steps forward with yesterday's federal budget. First ... we are actually going to receive, as Ontarians, the same amount of money for our education and social services as Canadians do in the other provinces and territories. Secondly ... the Canada-Ontario agreement, will now be well and truly honoured by Prime Minister Harper. Finally, the equalization formula has now been amended to provide that no receiving province can have a fiscal capacity greater than ours. That is only fair."

Premier, how could the equalization formula be something you were boasting about a year ago, and now suddenly it's to blame for Ontario's economic decline?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: You know, I would refer my colleague to a website which we've had up for some time now on behalf of Ontarians, fairness.ca. It contains a number of our responses to the ongoing, never-ending changes made to equalization. One of them reads as follows, and it's there today:

"Ontario continues to believe that the equalization program has grown too large, is not contributing to Canada's long-term prosperity, and that the formulas used to calculate payments are not fair to Canadians living in Ontario."

We've made our case clear for a long time. When these most recent changes were being contemplated, I went to, I think, pretty well every other provincial capital. I met with my counterparts and I tried to do editorial board meetings with all the major dailies in those capitals to put forward the Ontario position. We remain unhappy with the results of that, and now those chickens are coming home to roost.

We need to engage, together, in an important conversation with the federal government. They're taking too much money from us.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the truth is something rather like this: A year ago, Dalton McGuinty was boasting about the equalization formula, saying that all was fair and that great strides forward had been made. But now that Ontario is in economic decline, now that 200,000 good manufacturing jobs are going out the door—and more are going out the door every day—the McGuinty government is looking for someone to blame.

I say again, the federal government doesn't have control over industrial hydro rates in Ontario. The federal government can't implement a manufacturing investment tax credit to keep manufacturing in Ontario. The federal government can't put in place a 50% Buy Ontario strategy for Ontario. So, Premier, why do you continue to blame someone else for the McGuinty government's failure to take the appropriate action to retain good jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just a couple of specific examples of unfairness: One is employment insurance. It turns out that if you lose your job in Ontario, you stand to get about $4,000 less by way of employment insurance premium payments here than you would in any other province. We think that's unfair. Beyond that, we receive about $800 million less per annum when it comes to our health care payments that come from the federal government. Again, that is substantially less on a per capita basis than you would receive in any other province. We've got a problem with that.

We can and should debate the best way to address the issues inside the province. But I think it's important for us to come together in terms of this issue as to whether or not we can afford, especially at this point in our history, to send $20 billion to the federal government. I submit we can't afford that.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: In fact, Premier, your government doesn't send any money to the federal government. That is a neat little story you've cooked up. Again, Premier, it was you who a year ago said, "For the first time in a long time, we are actually going to receive, as Ontarians, the same amount of money for our education and social services as Canadians do in the other provinces and territories" from the federal government.

How could the Premier say last year that everything's fair and wonderful, that we're getting the right amount of money for health care and education from the federal government, and now that Ontario is in economic decline, suddenly up pops the Premier saying, "Oh, overnight it became unfair." How could you boast about it being fair last year, Premier, but now that there's bad news to take the blame for, suddenly it's unfair once again?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think this is a really iportant issue. The leader of the NDP does not seem to understand something which is really important to Ontarians. I'll just quote from the TD report:

"Ontario's projected move into equalization-recipient—at least temporarily—would suggest to many Canadians that the province is no longer a net contributor to federal coffers. However, this is not the case." In 2005, "Ontario residents contributed a hefty $21 billion more to federal coffers than what was returned to the province in federal spending."

It's really important for all Ontarians, but I would argue especially for the leader of the New Democratic Party, to understand that our province, through our citizens, sends $21 billion more to the federal government than we get back in return. That's important. It matters. It interferes with our capacity to make the kinds of investments that we might debate in this House, the kinds of investments that will help—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: It never ceases to amaze me that a year ago, when the economy was doing well, the Premier was happy with equalization and he was happy with the federal budget. Now that things aren't so rosy, what does he do? He reaches in the cupboard again and says, "Oh, it's all the fault of someone else."

Premier, here is the reality: Manufacturing jobs are leaving Ontario faster than you can say, "Jim Flaherty." That's what's really happening: 1,000 jobs in Oshawa, 500 jobs in Listowel yesterday, and now 320 working families out of work in the west end of Toronto as a result of Quebecor's announcement.

I say again, Premier, what do the other provinces and the federal government have to do with the fact that your government hasn't acted to sustain and retain good manufacturing jobs in Ontario?

1450

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, this is a very important debate because I think Ontarians are in fact coming together on this issue. There may be a few stragglers, a few laggards, a few who aren't prepared to embrace this debate in an effective way. We are doing everything we can, as a province and as a government, to help grow this economy, given the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

But there is an additional brake that is being applied to our progress, and that comes from the fact that, on an annual basis, Ontarians send over $20 billion to the federal government. I think that's a real issue. I believe that for Ontarians it's a real issue. I think we need to find a way to sit down with the federal government and find some way for us to retain more of that money so we can make the kinds of investments that we all want to make to further enhance our competitiveness and productivity.

Mr. Howard Hampton: What a revelation: People in Newfoundland pay taxes to the federal government; people in the Northwest Territories pay taxes to the federal government. Your brother, sitting in Ottawa as a member of Parliament, then sits down and decides how that money gets spent. Yes, when they buy frigates for the navy, it won't be money spent in Ontario. When they buy tanks for the army, it won't be money spent in Ontario. But the fact of the matter is, we're talking about the disappearance of good jobs; we're talking about the loss of economic opportunity in communities across Ontario. There is nothing that British Columbia can do for Ontario in that respect. That responsibility rests with the McGuinty government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Question?

Mr. Howard Hampton: When are we going to see a strategy that helps to sustain and retain jobs in Ontario, rather than looking for someone else—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague of our five-point plan. We are cutting business taxes, we are investing heavily in innovation, we're investing heavily in infrastructure, we are investing heavily in strategic partnerships with business, and we are investing heavily in the skills and education of our people. I think that's a very solid five-point plan, but we could move even further, we could go even faster, if we could retain just a little bit more of the wealth that we generate here in the province of Ontario. I think that's an important issue, and I call upon my colleagues in both parties opposite to join our government and the people of Ontario as we turn to the federal government and say we'd like to hang on to a bit more of our own wealth. We could especially use it at this point in time to make the kinds of investments that enhance our competitiveness, enhance our productivity and help us emerge from this economic period of challenge even stronger than ever.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation, who defines his responsibilities on his website as a "commitment to innovation as the driver of growth across all sectors of the economy ... better jobs for more people." I know the people of Listowel, and I know that they need the minister's help to support innovation and better jobs for more people in their community.

I'll ask the minister the same question he declined to answer yesterday. What will the Minister of Research and Innovation now do to help the 500 people losing their jobs in Listowel?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm glad for the question from my friend from the other half of Wellington county. Yesterday's question had to do with skills training, and I referred that, appropriately, to the minister. Your question today is more one of economics, and I want to share—

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's the same question.

Hon. John Wilkinson: It was a different question, I say with all due respect to my heckler.

I would say to the member, though, that we have in our Next Generation of Jobs Fund some $1.15 billion. That would be the fund that you voted against, but what we did on our side of the House was agree that we, as a government, can be a catalyst for economic growth.

I do want to say to all of my constituents in North Perth, and particular in Listowel, that I know how difficult this is. But they expect help and they expect hope and they expect a brighter future from their member. In working together with the Mayor Ed Hollinger and all the good councillors in North Perth on their economic development, we have had discussions about the fact that our government has the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, and when we add that to the skills training available through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased that the minister saw fit to answer the very same question I asked him yesterday.

We should all understand the devastating impact of 500 good jobs disappearing in Listowel, a community of 6,500 souls. The problem with the minister's assurances is that you cannot train for jobs that don't exist or jobs that are going to other jurisdictions with lower tax rates on new investment.

Will the minister acknowledge that Roger Martin, of the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, is right that the government should lower corporate income tax rates to stimulate business investment and create jobs in Listowel and across the province of Ontario?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I say to Roger Martin, who is from Wallenstein, in Wellington county, as my friend knows, that the most important thing we have to say is that Listowel, North Perth and all our communities have to find their way in the 21st century. We are not a government that believes that somehow we should be embracing the 20th century. What people expect from their government is solutions that have to do with the future of their children and grandchildren.

What company can locate to Listowel, where we have a tremendously gifted workforce, hard-working people in the heart of rural Ontario? What companies can we attract to Listowel and North Perth to ensure there will be another two generations of economic prosperity? That is my focus as Minister of Research and Innovation, not only for North Perth, in my riding, but all the ridings, including your own riding, sir, and for all the members. What our ridings and our constituents want is the ability for us to translate the opportunities of the 21st century and create wealth here in this province, just like they did in Listowel 48 years ago and like they will do yet again.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Minister of Education, the government has quietly put out for bidding a research contract to collect ethnic and racial data on two million school-aged children. Quite frankly, I'm getting a little tired of this ministry and its tendency to test and grade the performance of students instead of actually doing something to solve problems. More data further stigmatizes diverse communities and does nothing to help struggling students now. When will you stop studying and actually do something?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member opposite for the question. The request for proposals that the Hamilton Spectator reported on today is part of a commitment to the Ontario Human Rights Commission that was made last year. It was part of a settlement that we reached—a memorandum of understanding. As part of that, we agreed to hire an independent researcher to look at how statistics are gathered in other jurisdictions, in order to support boards that are engaged in figuring out where the kids are and who the kids are that are struggling in their boards.

The Ministry of Education does not collect race-based statistics, but we did commit to the OHRC that we would work with them to provide some research on how best to frame that kind of statistical analysis.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: When it comes to the gaps in student achievement in Ontario, this is just another example of the McGuinty government's love affair with research and statistics. The problem is not out there; the problem is here. The problem will not be solved by studying more, but by doing more. Why is it that the minister always finds money to study racialized communities but never finds money to actually help them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's true that we believe in evidence. That is true—absolutely.

The fact is that over the last four and a half years, we have put $4 billion into education in this province. Remember, that is in the face of declining enrolment, by next year, of 90,000 students fewer than in 2003. The point is that we have student success teachers in our secondary schools, we have lower primary class sizes and we have kids who have literacy supports. Specifically, we are the government that has put funding into aboriginal education; the first government to actually put in place a funding line for aboriginal education. So we brook absolutely no criticism of our approach to helping kids at risk in this province.

1500

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: To the Minister of Research and Innovation: Minister, earlier this week you launched the Ontario innovation agenda to a packed crowd at the Uni-

versity of Ottawa. The Ontario innovation agenda provides a roadmap to ensure that our province has a winning economy in the 21st century. The agenda calls for better use of our existing strengths, identifies key opportunities for Ontario and outlines the kind of environment Ontario must create to drive innovation.

We are already seeing the effects of innovation efforts in Ottawa. The National Post reported this week that after years of challenge in Ottawa's technology sector, the community has now reached a record 82,000 employees. That record has prompted the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation to launch a celebratory campaign called 82000reasons.com and tout its status as a leading centre for small business in the capital.

Can the minister please outline the Ontario innovation agenda and how it will create the next generation of jobs for Ontario?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to say to the member from Ottawa Centre and to all the members from the Ottawa area: Ottawa is back, bigger and stronger than ever before, and we applaud them for all of their efforts. Ottawa is one of those amazing communities where we have a tremendous wealth of talent.

I was particularly delighted to go to the University of Ottawa to launch Ontario's—

Interjection.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank particularly the University of Ottawa for being such a wonderful host for the launch of the Ontario innovation agenda. What I say to the people in Ottawa is that our strategy right now is helping to create wonderful jobs. We understand that with the tremendous research strength we have, we can extract that value and turn it into the jobs of the 21st century, into the new-economy jobs. We believe, particularly in Ottawa with its strength in ICT and environmental technologies, that they're in alignment with our agenda. I look forward to further announcements in Ottawa.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: We can all see Ontario's innovation agenda at work, whether it be at Plasco in Ottawa, where the Ministry of Research and Innovation invested $4 million to build an innovation demonstration facility aimed at turning waste into energy, or at Verdant Power in Cornwall, where the government invested $2.2 million to build an innovation demonstration facility aimed at generating electricity through underwater windmills. Our government recognizes that we can create Ontario's next generation of jobs by developing and inventing local solutions to global challenges.

I was dismayed to read in the Ottawa Citizen this morning that the member for Nepean–Carleton doesn't support the Ontario innovation agenda. This is the same Conservative Party that's calling for tax cuts in one breath and voting against a complete income exemption for new, emerging and innovative companies in the next. The member for Nepean–Carleton says the innovation agenda is "empty rhetoric" and that it doesn't do enough to preserve jobs in Ontario. Is this true?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I was actually quite surprised to read that as well from the member for Nepean–Carleton. I know that when we announced in the first place the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which is important, Mr. Tory—the chap who actually doesn't have a seat here—said that this was a "flawed approach."

Then I see my critic here, who sits in front of you in the House, and she said, when we made the announcement of Sanofi Pasteur's $100-million global R&D centre in this province:

"I ... want to thank the representatives from Sanofi for investing in Ontario and being in the Legislature today. There's no question that not only do we agree it is vital that we be part of research and innovation technologies, but also that our motivated and talented people deserve a lot of credit from the province of Ontario. We're glad they are being recognized...."

But then I saw the member for Nepean–Carleton's "empty rhetoric that doesn't do enough to create jobs." On this side of the House, we're quite consistent. We have a leader—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTING PRACTICES

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Premier, we've raised concerns about Bill 35 and the voodoo accounting techniques that your finance minister wants to use to create a new Liberal slush fund. As you may know, the Auditor General recently wrote to the finance committee and said the following:

"We believe that adherence to standards established by the CICA, the accounting profession's independent standard-setting body, provide both governments and auditors respectively with an objective and appropriate basis for the preparation and audit of financial statements and encourage comparability in financial reporting between jurisdictions." He goes on to say that the two sections of Bill 35 "could be interpreted as setting accounting standards through legislation as opposed to following generally accepted" accounting principles.

Premier, why did your Liberal members vote down any opportunity for the Auditor General to make his case at the finance committee this morning?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: What we're talking about is an effort on the part of our government to provide some additional support to our municipal partners, and we think this is the best way to do it.

There is an argument, as I understand it—I'm hardly an expert on this score, in the absence of the Minister of Finance—over whether we're in breach of certain accounting principles. I want Ontarians to understand that our intention here is to give effect to a stronger partnership with our municipalities. What we're saying is that we've found a way to do that. We will continue to listen to the auditor and carefully consider his advice, but what we're talking about is finding a way to give more money to our municipal partners. That will end up

relieving tax pressures on municipal ratepayers. We think that's a good idea.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the auditor, an independent officer of this Legislature, took the time to write to members of the finance committee, expressing his strong concerns with this legislation. He specifically asked for two sections of Bill 35 to be deleted. The auditor even offered to come before the committee to explain his concerns and answer our questions. Despite that, your Liberal members voted down any opportunity to hear from the Auditor General. In fact, your Liberal members of the committee voted against putting the words "municipality" and "infrastructure" in the bill.

Premier, given the Auditor General's concerns, and given the fact that the words "municipality" and "infrastructure" aren't even in the bill, why should we believe that this is anything except what my colleague from Beaches–East York said: the slush fund protection act?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: This party is not even in government, and yet they continue to attack the municipal sector, something they did for eight years when they were in government.

Let me quote Doug Reycraft, the president of AMO, on March 12, 2008: The proposed Investing in Ontario Act is "another significant step in the province's commitment to partnering with municipalities to help ease the infrastructure challenges they are facing."

This is yet another example of the McGuinty government's quest to improve relationships with the municipal sector and provide them with the necessary resources to ensure that the infrastructure on the ground is working and helping to build a stronger economy for the province of Ontario. The municipal sector is very appreciative of this. I wish the honourable member's party would get on board and stop attacking cities—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Labour. In December, when I inquired about the Lori Dupont inquest jury recommendations and the need for legislation in Ontario to address the epidemic of workplace violence and harassment, the minister said that the recommends were "worth having a look at," and he would definitely review these recommendations and give them a good, thorough study. Now, five months later, my question is, what has been the outcome of the McGuinty government's review, and what are the timelines for introducing workplace violence legislation here in Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Let me begin by thanking the honourable member, not only for the question but for her good work in this area. Indeed, she has put forward a private member's bill as well, which we're obviously taking a look at to see what it offers.

I have had the opportunity to meet with the Ontario Nurses Association, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario and a number of other labour stakeholders across the province on this issue. We're continuing our discussions. This is a very complex issue, and there are a number of areas we are looking at. I thank her for her interest, and I thank her for her involvement to date. We take this matter very, very seriously.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister would know that every labour organization in the province also knows that the McGuinty Liberals are stalling and have no intention of outlawing harassment and violence in the workplace despite the deaths, despite the injuries, despite discussions with the ONA, SEIU, labour councils, OPSEU, CEP, the OFL—every single union in this province.

Seven provinces in Canada have actually already got health and safety legislation similar to Bill 95, which I introduced a year ago. Why does the McGuinty government continue to oppose having a law that ensures health care workers and others—indeed all workers—have the right to safe workplaces here in the province of Ontario?

1510

Hon. Brad Duguid: This government believes very, very strongly in doing all that we can to create safe and healthy workplaces across this province. That's why we've hired 200 additional occupational health and safety inspectors across this province. That's almost double the amount that we had when we came into office. These health and safety inspectors are going out—

Interjection.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These health and safety inspectors are out and around the province, doing all that they can to try to make this province healthier and safer, and workplaces across this province healthier and safer.

Violence in the workplace is something this government does not tolerate. There's no place in this province for those kind of activities. We take it seriously. We continue to work with our stakeholders towards solutions that will help address this problem.

I thank the member for her question, and I thank her for her work in this area.

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is for the Minister of Revenue. I meet regularly with business leaders in my riding, and many have told me that they would like to see a reduction in the amount of paperwork and costs associated with filing their taxes. They have made the point clearly that red tape costs them time and money—money that could be put to greater use building their businesses and creating jobs.

Minister, can you tell me what the McGuinty government is doing to make it easier for Ontario businesses to file their taxes?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I want to thank the member for Richmond Hill for his question. It's a timely question, as we are in tax season.

I'm pleased to advise all of our colleagues in the House that our government has been listening to Ontario businesses, and we're acting on their advice. The Ministry of Revenue is making it easier for Ontario businesses to file their taxes. Our government wants to help businesses do what they do best: create jobs and foster a strong economy. That's why the McGuinty government is working with the federal government and has recently implemented the corporate tax administration redesign initiative, or CTAR. This is a program that will have a tremendous impact on businesses of all sizes in the province.

With this initiative in place, Ontario businesses will have one authority to deal with in the administration of their corporate taxes. As of April 3 of this year, Ontario businesses now only have to deal with one auditor, one objection and appeal system and one single tax advisory framework for pre-2009 taxation years. This initial step will be followed by the implementation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Minister, I can appreciate that this program has been a huge undertaking within both your ministry and the CRA. What have you done to ensure that Ontario businesses are aware of the changes to filing their corporation tax? Also, what have you done to ensure that the transition to the CRA is a smooth one?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: As I was saying, this was an initial step that we took on April 3 of this year, and it will be followed by the implementation of a single integrated corporate tax return beginning next year. Beginning in January of 2009, Ontario businesses will benefit from the following: one single tax form, one single tax collector and a single set of income tax rules.

The harmonization of corporate tax administration with the CRA means that province's businesses will not only save time and effort; they will also save up to $100 million in compliance costs. These changes will help businesses of all sizes free up resources that can be reinvested into growing their businesses and the Ontario economy.

Ontario businesses will further save $90 million annually in reduced Ontario corporate income tax as the provincial corporate tax base becomes harmonized with the federal corporate tax base. We estimate that this streamlining will save Ontario businesses $100 million to $200 million each year—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTES

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services: On April 25, OPP Commissioner Fantino was clear in a news release concerning problems at Tyendinaga and Deseronto: "This violent criminal activity occurred outside of any legitimate protest and will not be tolerated." It was not tolerated because people were arrested. Back in Caledonia, criminal activity was allowed to occur all weekend—not over a land claim, but in support of Tyendinaga. To my knowledge, no arrests were made on the weekend in Caledonia.

Minister, why does the OPP crack down at Deseronto but will not crack down at Caledonia?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Community Safety.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: This gives me a great opportunity to congratulate Commissioner Fantino, the incident commanders, senior officers and front-line officers for the remarkable job they're doing.

We appreciate that the OPP is handling these situations in a very, very professional manner, understanding that, at the end of the day, public safety is paramount. Congratulations to Commissioner Fantino. Congratulations to the OPP.

Mr. Toby Barrett: They did a good job at Deseronto.

Minister, on December 4 last year, I questioned you in the House and you said, "If the member is suggesting that the Solicitor General or any other minister or member should interfere with the operation of the OPP, he's wrong."

In this week's Dunnville Chronicle, there's an article written by Karen Best—she's a reporter known for her accuracy and thoroughness—and I quote the article, in part:

"Over the weekend, Six Nations band chief Bill Montour told Aboriginal Affairs Minister Michael Bryant that the blockade was not a criminal activity," and, further, "He gave credit to Bryant for talking to the Solicitor General, who reportedly told the OPP to stand down."

Speaker, we have a report before this House referring to the Solicitor General, who reportedly told the OPP to stand down. Minister, given your previous statements, are you prepared to resign?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: That allegation is ridiculous, and, no, I will not resign because I won't interfere with policing operations. We've learned from past history that you don't interfere as government with policing operations.

But what we can do, what we should do, what I'm asking him to do and that side to do, is to ensure that we ask the federal government to come to the table with our First Nations communities to settle these land claims. The OPP is doing a remarkable job at ensuring that public safety is the top priority, but there are two other partners here that have to come to the table. The federal government has a responsibility to come to the table to settle these land claims so that everyone can get along the way we want to get along in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SCHOOL POOLS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Health Promotion. At a time when we are desperately looking for ways to engage our youth and our

communities in physical activity, it is irrational to be closing pools. They were built and have already been paid for. To close them down is to mismanage, to waste, a public investment that took decades to build.

Will the minister tell the hundreds of young people, their parents and their grandparents who are at Queen's Park at this very moment that she will not allow their pools to close?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have answered this question many times and I'm happy to answer it again. The answer is that we have been working with boards of education in this province since we came into office in 2003. There are 78 swimming pools in schools in the Toronto District School Board. Across the province there are a few more, for a total of about 106, but the fact is that the bulk of pools in schools in the province are in the city of Toronto. They are in the Toronto District School Board.

The reality is that pools in other parts of the province are the responsibility of municipalities. What we have done is we have actually provided money to schools, a program enhancement grant, $5.4 million that the school board could apply to the pools, but the reality is that the board needs to have that conversation with the municipality. That has been my position since I was a trustee on this board.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I say to this minister: Your answer is irrational. Cities are broke. Boards of education are broke. The Toronto board has a deficit, a $42-million deficit, for which they're looking at ways to cut programs. Your answer is irrational.

These pools have been paid for by the city of Toronto and they've been built. These pools are important community resources, bought and paid for by Torontonians. Will you step up and do your job, as you smile at this problem? Help to keep these pools open.

1520

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Toronto District School Board has 31,000 fewer students than it did when we came into office. We have put $360 million in new dollars into the Toronto District School Board every year, in spite of that kind of decline in enrolment.

The Toronto District School Board has 99 properties that are surplus, that are not being used as schools, that could be leveraged to receive capital dollars. There are many, many options. I have met with the board a number of times. I have said to the board that I will meet with David Crombie, because I think he wants to talk to everyone; I have not been called by him yet. I will meet with him, and I have invited the leadership of the folks who are going to be on the lawn this afternoon to come in and speak with me. I understand that this is a serious issue for the community. It's an issue that I have been aware of since I was a school trustee, but I got into provincial politics so that we could put resources back into the boards of education and restore publicly funded education in this province—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. Obviously we've got spring upon us now, with warmer weather and longer daylight hours, but it seems like, especially on weekends, there are more and more people driving out and about on our roads, whether it's a drive to the cottage, to the local park or just heading out to do some shopping. It looks like, for some Ontarians, though, driving speeds are up. All of us in this House are rightfully concerned about the safety of our friends, our families and loved ones on our roads. I'm sure all Ontarians share that feeling.

I'm hoping that the Minister of Transportation can please explain to this House and to all Ontarians why it is of the utmost importance to always be very cautious of the roads while driving, not only in poor weather but at all times.

Hon. James J. Bradley: A very good question, and road safety of course is a priority for this government.

Specifically, Ontario has the toughest penalties in Canada for those who speed while driving, as well as those who are caught street racing, engaging in contests and engaging in stunt driving on our roads. Police can now suspend the licence and impound the vehicle of any individual caught stunt driving or driving 50 kilometres per hour over the speed limit. This means immediate safety for all road users.

We've also made changes which will allow for higher fines upon conviction. Now, instead of $200, $2,000 is the minimum; instead of $1,000, $10,000 is the maximum; and if caught again, the driver could end up with a 10-year licence suspension. Drivers need to understand the significant risks involved with speeding. I thank the member for raising this important issue as a reminder to all of us when we're on our highways to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I have a question for the same minister. I understand that the legislation and the supporting regulation which allowed for the enforcement of the higher fines and impoundment of vehicles took effect on September 30 last year. Almost daily, I see stories in the newspapers, hear about them on the radio and see them on TV, about another street racer being charged. I know that this government has worked hard to get the word out, but I'm hoping that the Minister of Transportation can please tell the House today how we have worked to inform the Ontario public of these new rules and how we continue to work to enforce safety on our roads for all our loved ones in Ontario.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Public awareness is always a key consideration when implementing any legislation. This government worked very hard along with the member for Newmarket–Aurora, who had a very great

interest in this issue. We continue to work hard to make sure the public is aware of the changes that are made.

Ways we have done this include installing new excessive speeding signs in key speeding hot spots throughout the province, running suspension and vehicle seizure messages on the changeable compass highway signs and distributing new public education cards and posters, because as pointed out by the member, there's been extensive media coverage.

While we're working very hard to get the message out to keep our roads safe, there's always more than can be done, which is why we continue to work with our safety partners and our police partners across Ontario to curb aggressive driving. Since September, there have been over 4,000 roadside licence suspensions and vehicle impoundments.

VEHICLE SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Two weeks ago, 12 school buses were pulled off the road for safety reasons; they couldn't meet safety standards. Today, York Regional Police announced that in a two-day blitz this week, of 472 commercial vehicles they inspected, 137 were pulled off the road because they could not meet safety standards. That's one in three trucks on our highways today that represent a serious safety threat.

Could the minister tell us how it is that Ontario's roads and highways, which about five years ago were considered among the safest in North America, now have one in three commercial vehicles travelling them that are serious safety risk?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to say to the former minister that my note says the same his did five years ago: "Ontario's roads are among the safest in America," and indeed they are.

Coincidentally—and the former minister would have done this as well—I was at Downsview today, where the Ministry of Transportation has a very significant presence, and they were pulling trucks off the 401 and doing inspections. The inspections are extremely thorough. We have top-notch ministry officials who do that through the enforcement branch. They look at any and all problems that could possibly be encountered in these trucks. The member would agree with me, because I remember he had the same feeling when he was minister, that it is unacceptable for any commercial vehicle in this province to have defects that could place others, including the driver, in some real difficulties.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to commend the Ministry of Transportation personnel who do those inspections, as well as our front-line police officers.

Here's the problem: Today we have a situation, based on those inspections, which tells us that one out of every three commercial vehicles does not deserve to be on the road; they are a serious threat. My question to the minister is, knowing that information, what specific plans does he have to send a message to the industry that this is unacceptable, whether it be vehicles that don't meet safety standards or whether it's unqualified drivers? What is he specifically going to do?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to tell the member, first of all, that fines for operating an unsafe commercial vehicle can be as much as $20,000, which is four times greater than any other Canadian jurisdiction. For some offences, the fines can be as high as $50,000. We're the only North American jurisdiction to impound trucks and trailers with critical defects.

Each year, we conduct approximately 140,000 commercial driver and vehicle inspections, and 12 province-wide and 250 regional truck safety blitzes. Despite growing traffic in Ontario, there has been a decrease in fatal collisions involving large trucks over the last 15 years. I could give other statistics, but I think it is important, and I think the member's question is important: Through this question and all the publicity we can generate, people out there had better know that Ministry of Transportation officials are on a vigilant watch and will prosecute those who violate our laws.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines: Today marks the 45th day of imprisonment for the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug leadership. On Monday, the minister said he would write to Platinex Inc. next week, asking them to consult with First Nations, after the McGuinty government recorded another 72,000 acres of new mining claims by Platinex.

The Supreme Court of Canada has been very clear: It is the responsibility of governments to consult with and accommodate First Nations. The Supreme Court of Canada has been clear on something else: This responsibility cannot be delegated to third parties.

Why does the McGuinty government continue to believe it does not have a responsibility and a duty to consult with and accommodate First Nations and can pass that off to private companies?

1530

Hon. Michael Gravelle: The leader of the third party knows full well that we take our duty to consult extremely seriously, and we're meeting that duty to consult on a daily basis. We recognize that it's not just a one-off process; it's continual. That's our number one priority; there's no question about that.

But also, in terms of our relationship with First Nations and the companies that are moving forward on mineral development, indeed we think it's extremely important to encourage them to make sure that they are going, at the earliest stage possible, to meet with First Nations in terms of the consultation process. In terms of Platinex, with the claim that they have put in place recently, we are asking them to move forward with that. We've asked them to do that with the Matawa tribal council. Indeed, I'm going to write them with the same request. That's something we consider extremely important, but by no means does it make a difference in

terms of how we recognize our duty to consult in a very, very serious way.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Father Tadeusz Walczyk at St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church in Alliston for sending me this petition.

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I agree with this petition and I've signed it.

SCHOOL POOLS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have close to 2,000 signatures for this petition. It reads:

"Whereas the Toronto District School Board is looking at closing school pools, which will affect many physical education and co-curricular sports programs across the city. This will also affect communities who use the pools when they are not being used by TDSB students;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To act now to save our school pools."

I'm going to sign this petition because I support it very strongly.

DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY

Mr. Reza Moridi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the" land of the "David Dunlap Observatory in Richmond Hill is of historical and heritage significance" as it "was donated in trust by the Dunlap family to the University of Toronto in 1935, and the pre-Confederation farmhouse is still standing;

"Whereas the observatory, featuring the largest optical telescope in Canada, has been the site of great scientific discoveries; it has been a place of learning not only for students of the University of Toronto but for the general public as well;

"Whereas the observatory has been recently declared by the University of Toronto as 'surplus' to its academic needs and subject to sale for development;

"Whereas the observatory occupies an incredibly unique and beautiful 180 acres of green space, the largest such space in the town of Richmond Hill, with trees, birds, animals, plants, insects and butterflies in the middle of a rapidly urbanized area;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the protection of this property of such historical, scientific and natural significance" from being used as commercial development.

I present to you today about 1,100 signatures, which were presented to me during the rally held at Queen's Park on January 16.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have here a petition signed by a great many of my constituents and presented to me by Roelie Veldhuizen from Burgessville. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to present this petition.

HOME CARE

Mme France Gélinas: I have a petition from the Service Employees International Union and the people of Toronto.

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of

termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;...."

They ask the Ontario government "(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it with Matthew.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Jeff Leal: I just got another petition dealing with "Stop Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles—Bill 56.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Rafaël.

LORD'S PRAYER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Nepean–Carleton

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Jackpot. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's why I think you're the best Speaker I've ever experienced in my time here.

From 1,629 people, a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from Nepean–Carleton:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition, and I'll pass it on to Bilaal. He's our page.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East local health integration network ... board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum ... birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas, with the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million (of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government), it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fast-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

I will affix my signature and pass it to Jasdeep.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Frank Klees: Mr. James Castronovo, the department head of Canadian world studies at Sacred Heart High School, signed this, along with other teachers and students, which proclaims Pope John Paul II day. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's Bill 25 by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

I'm pleased to affix my personal signature to this, as a proponent of this bill, and pass the petitions on to page Jack.

1540

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I'd like to read it and thank Dr. Mario Palermo, a pediatric dentist practising from the Credit Valley Medical Arts centre for having sent it to me. It reads as follows:.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I thank the people for having signed the petition. I'm pleased to sign and to support it, and to send it down with page Cali.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Ajax-Pickering hospital should have full funding for mental health, including beds;

"Whereas this would affect the mental health programs and mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering hospital;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Fully fund the mental health beds and programs at Ajax-Pickering hospital."

I'm happy to sign in support of this petition and to pass it to page Sheilagh.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, on behalf of the people of Eglinton–Lawrence. It reads:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

As I'm in agreement, I have affixed my signature and given it to page Dario.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kuldip Kular: I have a petition from Dr. Nguyen and his friends to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with the petitioners, so I put my signature on the petition and ask Peter to take it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 28, 2008, on the amendment to the motion by Mr. Bryant to amend the standing orders.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 30, I am now required to put the question.

Mrs. Witmer has moved an amendment to Mr. Bryant's motion for amendments to the standing orders. Is it the pleasure of the House that the amendment carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1547 to 1552.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia
Barrett, Toby	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Elliott, Christine	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Gélinas, France	Kormos, Peter	Shurman, Peter
Hampton, Howard	MacLeod, Lisa	Wilson, Jim

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed will please rise.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Delaney, Bob	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Dickson, Joe	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Dombrowsky, Leona	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Duguid, Brad	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Rinaldi, Lou
Best, Margarett	Gravelle, Michael	Ruprecht, Tony
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Sergio, Mario
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sousa, Charles
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Takhar, Harinder S.
Carroll, Aileen	Mangat, Amrit	Van Bommel, Maria
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Wilkinson, John
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Craitor, Kim	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 18; the nays are 48.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the amendment lost.

The question is now on the main motion by Mr. Bryant for amendments to the standing orders. Is it the pleasure of the House that that motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1555 to 1600.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members take their seats, please. Some of us have a long ride home. I heard what the Minister of Transportation said about speeding and I have to be conscious of that.

We're now voting on the main motion by Mr. Bryant for amendments to the standing orders. All those in favour will rise one at a time to be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Pendergast, Leeanna
Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Phillips, Gerry
Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Rinaldi, Lou
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Ruprecht, Tony
Best, Margarett	Gravelle, Michael	Sandals, Liz
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Sergio, Mario
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sousa, Charles
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Takhar, Harinder S.
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Van Bommel, Maria
Carroll, Aileen	Mangat, Amrit	Wilkinson, John
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Zimmer, David
Craitor, Kim	Milloy, John	
Delaney, Bob	Moridi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
DiNovo, Cheri	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Elliott, Christine	Kormos, Peter	Shurman, Peter
Gélinas, France	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Hampton, Howard	Marchese, Rosario	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	
Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 49; the nays are 19.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

PAYDAY LOANS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 CONCERNANT LES PRÊTS SUR SALAIRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 24, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 48, An Act to regulate payday loans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to speak to Bill 48, An Act to regulate payday loans. My caucus colleagues and I believe it is high time that this McGuinty government addressed the issue of payday loans. As with all private members' bills, this government turns a blind eye and acts only when the elephant that is sitting in the living room is simply too big to ignore. When the McGuinty government finally decides to act, they have the audacity to turn into government legislation the same private members' bills that they themselves shot down months or years earlier.

I thought I was having déjà vu, as it was only last week that I spoke to a piece of private member's legislation that was being introduced for the fourth time. Unfortunately, this is yet another piece of legislation that must be thrust under the government's nose a fourth time in the hopes that this latest effort will make it through the gauntlet of the Premier's office.

The member for Welland, the former member for Barrie and the member for Parkdale–High Park have all recognized the need for regulation in the payday loan industry.

This government's thinly veiled concern for our most vulnerable citizens is nothing more than a photo op. I was absolutely shocked when I read that some payday loan companies are charging 1,000% interest—1,000 % interest is absolutely insane. I would have thought that this was an illegal amount to charge in the first place.

The interest charge demonstrates that this particular industry is unable to govern itself accordingly, and that a cap on the rate of interest, as was done by the province of Quebec, is desperately needed here in Ontario. Quebec capped interest rates at 35%, and I understand that this number has also been proposed for Ontario.

Currently, there are financial institutions charging 37.5% in our province. My concern and the concern of our stakeholders is that capping interest at the rate of 35% would cause unnecessary delays in implementing regulations, as payday loan companies would undoubtedly challenge this capped rate. The payday loan companies themselves have made it clear that anything less than—get this—400% interest would cause them to close their doors. Obviously, they are already experiencing a significant default rate if they require 400% interest to remain viable. Capping the interest rates anywhere from 35% to 50% may, in fact, weed out those companies that are preying on the disenfranchised.

The regulation of payday loans should involve more than the Ministry of Government Services. I believe that there's a huge interest here on the part of the Minister of Community and Social Services in the research on this issue, because it points to a much greater problem in Ontario than simply stop-gap loans.

The primary consumers of this product are younger than the general population, and they are making between $35,000 and $41,000 a year. Technically, this income bracket is above the poverty level, but not by much in terms of the money that is left in their pockets after the government takes its share. I believe that this income bracket deserves an official title. They should be referred to as the McGuinty working poor—sad, but true, as they are taxed within an inch of their life.

It is this group of young earners who are being forced to go to the payday loan establishments. The reason is that the McGuinty government has heaped tax upon tax, fee upon fee on their most modest incomes. The Premier will never admit to these taxes, as he has coached his cabinet and caucus to refer to them as user fees.

The McGuinty working poor are being crushed under the weight of these fees and health taxes. Instead of eliminating the root causes of McGuinty's new class of working poor, this government has the audacity to sit idly by, defeating bill after bill, while members on the opposition benches try valiantly to at least offer these struggling young people a life raft and a modicum of protection.

Perhaps it is time for the McGuinty government to develop a long-term plan; some strategic plan. I realize this is faint hope, but I feel the need to make the plea regardless. Why on earth would these young people continue to stay in such an oppressive climate, when they could travel to almost any other province and have more disposable income and a higher quality of life? As my caucus colleagues have quite astutely pointed out in the past, the only thing the McGuinty government is teaching our young people is how to read a road map, and it says, "Go west, young citizen."

My colleagues have been predicting that the policies of this McGuinty government will transform Ontario into a have-not province. Sure enough, we have become a have-not province in record time. According to Statistics Canada, Ontario's standard of living has been below the national average for two years in a row and the gap is growing.

The McGuinty government's decision to continue their tax-and-spend ways while overlooking real solutions to the problems facing our young people and the working poor will reap dire consequences for all of us. On one hand, the McGuinty government says that they want to stop the brain drain and keep our young professionals here in Ontario. On the other hand, they are taxing the very same people they profess to want to keep here. They are taxing them within an inch of their life.

Unfortunately, consistency is not, and has never been, a goal or reality of this McGuinty administration. Payday

loan businesses need to have clear and consistent guidelines for the protection of consumers. In North America, payday loan businesses are a fairly recent phenomenon and have experienced exponential growth in the short time that they have been here. Without any regulations to protect some of our most vulnerable citizens, these companies will continue to expand unchecked in our communities.

1610

There are reasons why we do not see these businesses in the affluent sections of town and why they're a dime a dozen in the poorer sections—simply, supply and demand.

If the Bank of Canada regulates interest rates for established lending institutions, why is it taking this government so long to recognize and establish interest rate caps on payday loan companies?

The sudden appearance of these businesses speaks to the desperation of the individuals involved. When all the fees are added, whether they are the set-up fees, the broker fees or the verification fees, on top of the interest rate charged, it far exceeds any maximum rate that's permitted by the law. I think that this is a very unequal and unfair playing field for those people who find themselves in the challenging predicament of having to take a payday loan.

I think it's necessary to have the full public consultation, a process that all of our bills deserve to have. I would stress that the cooling-off period suggested is the right thing to do. A person should have the right to cancel the loan within one business day of applying or receiving the initial advance. There is also the ability of the government to set a cap on the interest rate. I think those are very important elements that need to be included.

If these individuals are forced to pay exorbitant interest rates of up to 1,000%, then there is something seriously wrong. Clearly, this is a disenfranchised group of individuals who are in this circumstance for a variety of reasons. We, as legislators, need to know why so many young people are in this bind and unable to access more traditional lines of credit or financing through established lending institutions.

Stakeholders have speculated that it is their high debt ratio that has brought our young people to this position in the first place. They've graduated from college or university with anywhere from $25,000 to $100,000 in debt. In addition to student loan debt, they have credit card debt and are now compounding the problem with multiple payday loans. Perhaps the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities should pay close attention to the impact that student loans are having on the financial future of our young people. These young graduates are caught between a rock and a hard place. They have graduated with a tremendous debt load and, given the number of jobs fleeing Ontario under the McGuinty government, their economic prospects will be and are fairly bleak. Couple that with the collection agencies who are hounding them like the devil to repay this loan, and, do you know what, we have a recipe for disaster. These students will be robbing Peter to pay Paul, going from payday loan office to collection agency and back again.

Many of the members here today know that student loans is one of the most frequent issues that our constituency offices receive calls on.

The unfortunate circumstances that our students find themselves in after completing their schooling is beyond the pale and will only continue to degenerate as our economy slows to a crawl under this administration. As opposition critic for education, I recognize an area of opportunity within our schools and our curriculum that may prevent some of these problems.

When a student enters a post-secondary institution in Ontario, they are bombarded with credit card applications during frosh week. By graduation, their credit card rating is shot, and to add to their burden, they have to begin repaying these student loans. Our young people are emerging from their education on a poor financial footing.

My caucus colleague the member from Nepean–Carleton coined the phrase "fiscal literacy." I think it is high time that we begin teaching fiscal literacy in our schools. Teaching our children life skills helps to prepare them for the ups and downs that life throws their way. It is not a random occurrence if there is a significant number of young adults making between $35,000 and $41,000 relying on payday loans to get by. Banking, bookkeeping and the investment world are far more complex now than thay were in my parents' generation. Understanding the complexities of the financial sector impresses upon students the cause and effect of poor credit and the importance of maintaining good credit. Fiscal literacy is as important to the success of an individual as many other aspects of a well-rounded curriculum.

I return to my earlier point, which is that this government should investigate the reasons for the explosion of this industry into the marketplace. It is entirely possible that education could be a part of the solution to the problem. For that reason, I am very interested in exploring part VII of this legislation, which would establish an Ontario payday lending education fund. But it is not clear whether Minister McMeekin would utilize this education fund to promote the policies and safeguards of the legislation, or whether the funding would be directed to preventive, proactive and educational initiatives. This is the only bright spot in the legislation. If we, as legislators, add a proactive element to our bills, we may be able to achieve positive changes in the lives of our fellow Ontarians. The opportunity exists to create policies similar to those governing casinos in the province of Ontario, where a portion of the revenue is directed to gambling addiction awareness. The public consultation process will be extremely telling.

Laurie Campbell, the executive director of Credit Canada, agrees that education is key to solving the root problems for at least our young people caught in this loan cycle. Until we correct those root problems, we must protect our citizens who rely on this stopgap financing to make it through the week or the month. The fee structure of a payday loan facility resembles a copy of the govern-

ment's user-fee checklist—it's a very complex thing and it's a very long thing. If we are to regulate this industry, I suggest we carefully review the list of fees that an individual is expected to pay. Simply capping the interest rates will only serve to increase the broker fee or the loan insurance.

I don't understand how you can even charge insurance for a loan of this nature. The clients are already high-risk, and I would argue that the massive ballooning interest rates would be all the insurance one would need.

While I have discussed the vulnerability of our young citizens in respect to this unregulated payday loan company, there are many more groups at risk here. Ms. Campbell from Credit Canada identified several groups who are being exploited by payday loan businesses across Ontario. A rapidly growing group is new Ontarians. The immigrant community, unfamiliar with established banking institutions or who perhaps do not yet possess the credentials required to access traditional finance companies, resort to payday loans. Families who have left their homeland in search of a better life and better opportunities become caught in a circle of payday loan dependence.

We should expand any educational initiative to include outreach to the new immigrant community. A pamphlet, perhaps, clearly outlining the pitfalls of payday loan places may assist them in making better choices and seeking out established financial institutions that offer services in their mother tongue.

Another vulnerable group that Ms. Campbell brought to my attention is our senior citizens. More and more seniors on fixed incomes are finding themselves in debt these days. It is a sad state of affairs when the people who worked so hard all of their lives, who built our communities and paid their taxes, now find themselves unable to make ends meet. It is unconscionable for an organization to charge 1,000% interest to a senior who will be back in a week to repay that interest and pay it again and again and again. For some reason or other, these seniors find themselves unable to use established lending facilities, and without capped interest rates and strong regulations, payday loan companies will continue to abuse our seniors.

I believe that, given Ontario's current economic climate under the McGuinty government, we need to act fast. If the Premier of the province refuses to let this bill go through on the fourth attempt, I shudder at the repercussions for our vulnerable citizens.

There's a common theme running through my speech today, and that is that the economy is simply not up to snuff. Perhaps the Premier and his government are waiting for our welfare cheques to roll in from the federal government, since we are now a have-not province, before they take action. There are not enough good-paying jobs to help the working poor and those who are struggling under the oppressive taxes of the McGuinty government improve their lot in life.

1620

Companies are leaving Ontario in droves because our tax rates are prohibitive to future growth and investment. The previous Conservative government left this province on solid ground, and when we were government this province was the economic engine that drove this country. Now, five short years later, Ontario is dead last in job creation, we have lost 200,000 manufacturing jobs and the welfare rolls are up 11%. That's thanks to the tax-and-spend policies of the McGuinty government.

I am not sure how many more examples of the dire consequences of this government's complete lack of fiscal mismanagement we can share before they take action. The evidence exists. We here on the opposition benches have done our due diligence in ringing the warning bells about the state of our economy. Our impassioned pleas have fallen on deaf ears. Once again, the Premier-knows-best routine is going to send our vulnerable citizens further into despair and to the payday loan establishments.

The time to act is now. If the McGuinty government continues down the same path, we are going to experience even more job losses. The only ones who will benefit from this dire situation are the payday loan companies. They will be cashing in as laid-off workers are forced to take minimum-wage jobs, use borrowed money to put food on the table and to keep their family home. This is the fourth time this bill has come forward, and it is time that the Premier finally tunes in to what's going on here in the province.

Remember the days when your neighbours used to side half of their house one season and the other half the next? Well, that's because that's all they could afford to do. Those days are long gone. Everything must be immediate, and our children and our grandchildren are burying themselves in debt. Once again, let me restate my support for the regulated payday loan industry. It is my hope that this government will wake up from their slumber and finally steer Ontario's economy in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments? Seeing none—the honourable member from Richmond Hill.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Okay. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm not going to be lengthy this afternoon because it's time this bill got into committee, and New Democrats are eager to see it there.

I do want to acknowledge and thank Peter, the page who's bringing me fresh water. Thank you, Peter. I do want to acknowledge and thank ACORN. You'll recall that they have been active as advocates for just plain folks; they've been active as advocates for those folks in provoking payday regulation legislation.

We in the NDP are especially proud of our member from Parkdale–High Park, Ms. DiNovo, who of course has sponsored payday legislation in this House and will be the lead for the NDP on this bill as it proceeds through committee. I was proud because some time ago now, but it was with the assistance of ACORN and the NDP research office here at Queen's that I was able to present,

we had second reading on the first payday loan regulation legislation.

The Liberals at the time said it wasn't within the jurisdiction of the province. The Liberals said, "Oh, what are you doing? The province doesn't have the legal authority to regulate payday lenders." They blamed the feds. Well, Lord love a duck if all of a sudden now we don't have the Liberals doing a complete about-face and coming forward with legislation.

The issue has been with us for far too long. Folks are getting gouged, getting ripped off, getting burned, getting scammed by payday lenders with interest rates that are compounding, but hidden away—not just hundreds of percentages, but thousands. I quite frankly, at the end of the day, would rather not regulate payday lenders; I would rather abolish them, because there shouldn't be room in our society for these types of rip-off artists. But the reality is that unless we have an increase in the minimum wage, unless we stop the hemorrhaging of jobs that we're losing, unless we have fair housing policies that let people live in affordable housing and unless we have daycare that is provided to all children at a fair and reasonable rate so it's affordable for all families, there are going to be people who prey on the poorest people in our community.

It was noted the other day—it was Ms. DiNovo who said it—that it's remarkable that if you've got money, you don't have to pay very much to borrow money. Heck, I get 1.9% interest promotions in the mail. How come people who most need the break, when it comes to interest rates, don't get 1.9% interest promotions? They are desperate, and payday lenders prey on that desperation.

It is incredibly important, when this goes to committee, that there be wide-ranging, broad-based consultations, not just here in Toronto, but access to that committee should be made available to everybody across the province because, let me tell you, the reality for people in Toronto is not the reality for people in smaller-town Ontario, and the reality for people in smaller-town Ontario is not the reality for people in the far north, when it comes to having to stretch an insufficient or inadequate paycheque, or no paycheque at all. At the end of the day, I'd rather borrow money from Tony Soprano than from a payday lender. He treated his clients much more fairly and with more generosity.

I brought a Bible here today and, as I put it on my desk, it happened to fall open to Nehemiah, chapter 5, verses 10 and 11: "But let the exacting of usury stop. Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses and also the usury you are charging them." It just happened to fall open to that chapter of Nehemiah; it did.

This government fails the poorest people in our province by not having a regulated interest rate as part and parcel of the legislation. It means that it can respond to whatever pressures are put on it over the course of the coming months to set whatever interest rate it approves by way of regulation. That means that regulation can be changed anytime a government wants to, at its whim.

As I say, the debate should be about poverty in this province and this government's failure to address it, not in any meaningful way but in any way, shape or form whatsoever. The government talks about it; there's a lot of yakking going on about poverty. You don't solve poverty by striking committees, giving more money to the United Way or having a food bank campaign once a year, whether you're here in Toronto or in towns like where I come from. You solve poverty by giving people the means to escape from it, like the right to join a trade union, among other things, like the right to card-based certification, like a minimum wage that's a real living wage—that is, a minimum wage that's $10 an hour now and $11 an hour by 2011—and like affordable housing. This government hasn't just dropped the ball when it comes to those things; it never picked up the ball in the first place. I'm sure there are biblical quotes that could be referenced with respect to that failure as well, but we'll leave that for another time.

Folks should know that this bill will pass today, and it's going to pass because opposition members want it to go to committee. Opposition members will force it to committee. I encourage people to participate fully in those committee hearings. They have a right to come here to Queen's Park, or wherever that committee may choose to sit, to tell their stories and to call upon this government to not just regulate payday lenders but eliminate the demand for their so-called services.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to join the debate and support Bill 48, An Act to regulate payday loans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. The reason I'm so pleased to stand and speak to this bill is because this is an issue of critical importance in my community of Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

As the United Way report Losing Ground: The Persistent Growth of Family Poverty in Canada's Largest City points out, the lure of quick-fix money solutions is one that challenges communities and families right across the city of Toronto. Certainly, we've seen the proliferation in my community of payday loan institutions, of access to that very expensive but quick capital. According to the United Way report that was released in November 2007, we've seen an eightfold increase in the number of payday loans and cheque-cashing outlets in the city of Toronto—up to 317 outlets in 2007, from 39 not many years before.

According to Ernst and Young, it is estimated that first-time borrowers ultimately take out an average of 15 loans. The industry claims that the majority of profits come from repeat borrowers who are unable to pay off the loan on time and who then incur additional fees and interest rates and get themselves into a continuous cycle of dependence upon these very high interest rate loans.

According to ACORN, the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada, payday loan users tend to have little cash in their bank accounts, are behind in bill or loan payments, and have no credit card

or almost no one to turn to in the face of their financial difficulties.

I'm very proud that this bill speaks to the very issues raised by the United Way in its call to see the regulation of the payday lending sector. As you will note, in the fall of 2006, the federal government introduced a provision that allowed provinces to regulate the payday lending industry. We are taking the opportunity presented to us by the actions taken by the federal government to meet the needs of citizens in our province and to regulate this proliferating industry.

The province of Ontario was called upon by the United Way to develop rigorous new regulatory measures to protect consumers from usurious rates of interest, set interest rate caps and limits on fees and charges, and prohibit rollovers and other practices that trap consumers in a debt cycle.

I am very proud that Bill 48 speaks directly to those calls for action. It puts in place consumer protection features, including a cooling-off period which allows the borrower two business days to cancel the payday loan agreement without penalty—the borrower need give no reason for the cancellation of the agreement—and it operates to cancel the payday loan agreement as if it never existed.

We also put forward in the Payday Loans Act, should it pass, prohibition with respect to conventionally termed language of rollovers, back-to-back loans where the borrower pays off the first loan but must immediately borrow again to meet financial needs until the next payday. Those are prohibited practices. Concurrent loans are prohibited. Default charges and collection charges are prohibited. Discounting loan principal is prohibited, which is a practice that is used by lenders to hide fees rather than include them in the cost of borrowing. For example, a borrower borrows $300 but receives $280 because 20 of those dollars go toward document administration. If the loan is for $300, the individual should receive $300.

Under the proposed legislation, we will set a maximum total-cost-of-borrowing cap to limit the amount payday lenders can charge, and we'll work with an independent expert advisory board to recommend what that maximum total cost of borrowing should be.

We're also going to require lenders and brokers to be licensed, and we're going to impose serious penalties for lenders who break the law.

It's also important and imperative, as set out by the United Way, to do some work with respect to educating the public about what they may be considering when they seek to take out a payday loan. So we'll be establishing an education fund where we'll educate the public, providing consumers with information that they need to protect themselves and to make those informed choices.

Our government takes tackling the issue of poverty very seriously. As set out by the United Way in their recent report, this is one element that needs to be tackled head-on to make sure that our communities have the information and the protections they need to prevent a continued proliferation of usurious interest rates, of high interest rates, where families have no other options.

We know how hard people are struggling when it comes to making ends meet and we are doing our best to support them and provide the protections they need to also protect themselves. That's what this act is all about, and I'm very pleased to lend my support to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Duguid has moved second reading of Bill 48, An Act to regulate payday loans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the committee? Agreed.

Hon. David Caplan: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

I would just remind members that this House stands adjourned. We begin at 9 a.m. next Monday under the new standing orders, with question period at 10:45 a.m. We're adjourned until Monday, May 5, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1637.

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First Session, 39th Parliament

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2008

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Monday 5 May 2008

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Lundi 5 mai 2008

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 5 May 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 5 mai 2008

The House met at 0900.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROVINCIAL ANIMAL WELFARE ACT, 2008

LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2008 SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE DES ANIMAUX

Mr. Bartolucci moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We're moving into a new time frame here. I want to indicate to you that when I first arrived here a long time ago, they allowed members to bring coffee into the legislative chamber. Now we're going to be here at 9 o'clock in the morning, and I normally have a coffee at my desk at 9 o'clock in the morning. Mr. Speaker, I ask your indulgence to allow the morning session to enjoy a cup of coffee while they're listening to debate here in our morning sessions.

Hon. Michael Bryant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Of course it's up to members of this House to decide on unanimous consent matters, and I also will obviously respect whatever ruling you make with respect to decorum etc., but if in fact the House agrees, not only do I think that the dean of the Legislature deserves a coffee, but I'll be happy to pour it for him. I'm assuming it's a double-double for Mr. Sterling.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. I'll take the points of order under consideration.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Now that we've solved the coffee dilemma and the double-double issue, we will move into debate. I'm going to be sharing my time with the parliamentary assistant, the member from Brant, Dave Levac, who will have carriage of this through committee. I want to thank him for his hard work with this bill.

This is a very, very timely time to have second reading debate. This is historic. We are now meeting at 9 o'clock in the morning for the first time ever and we're debating bills for the first time ever. We're doing something that we haven't done for over 80 years: We're revising one of the acts.

It is also Emergency Preparedness Week. Later on today, and tomorrow, and for the course of the week, I'll be making announcements. We should never, ever forget our animals in Emergency Preparedness Week. This is also another historic week because it's Be Kind to Animals Week.

Last month, I introduced Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. Today, I am again pleased to speak to this legislation on second reading. What better way to mark the week than through thoughtful deliberations on an important piece of legislation that aims to better protect animals; proposed legislation that would, if passed, make Ontario's animal protection laws the strongest in Canada; legislation that represents the first significant revisions to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act since 1919?

Before I get into the details of our proposed legislation, I want to thank the member from Willowdale, David Zimmer, a strong advocate for animal protection, who last December received the World Society for the Protection of Animals special award for leadership in animal welfare for his work to regulate roadside zoos. It is to his credit, along with the hard work of many stakeholders, that this legislation was introduced.

I am also pleased to acknowledge the honourable member from Eglinton–Lawrence, Mike Colle, who in 2001 led the fight to close down puppy mills in Ontario. Thank you, Michael, for your great work. I would also like to thank my colleague from York–Simcoe, Julia Munro, and Leeds–Grenville member Bob Runciman for their commitment to animal welfare in Ontario.

The care, love and protection of animals represents all that is good about our society. This is all about protecting our animals. The Ontario SPCA's management staff and volunteers are devoted to the well-being of all animals. They make exceptional efforts to provide animals housed in OSPCA shelters with the highest standards of care. We thank the OSPCA for the remarkable job they do.

The McGuinty government is also committed to a strong animal welfare system in Ontario. Our government recently invested $5 million to improve and modernize Ontario's SPCA facilities and shelters across the province. This represents the largest single investment in the OSPCA by any government. We should all be very, very proud of that. It also builds on other recent initiatives, including more than quadrupling animal funding for the OSPCA to $500,000 a year, the first increase

since 2000, and investing $100,000 to train OSPCA inspectors and agents to carry out zoo inspections.

Last month, I visited the OSPCA's headquarters in Newmarket, along with Mike Colle and David Zimmer, to speak about this proposed legislation. While I was there, I met a dog named Crash, who as a puppy was deliberately thrown from a speeding pickup truck. I see our pages, who are grade 7 and 8 students from across the province, looking in dismay that someone would do that. They're right; we're all dismayed when an animal is mistreated. Despite the heroic efforts of the OSPCA and the Parry Sound Animal Hospital, Crash's leg had to be amputated. Good news, though: Today, Crash is a healthy and happy dog, living with the OSPCA inspector who adopted him.

0910

Unfortunately, these terrible occurrences don't always have a happy ending. There are too many incidents of dogs and cats being abused, birds being trained for cockfights and animals going unfed and held in deplorable conditions. It is also wrong when exotic animals are confined in roadside zoos where enclosures are too small or not properly secured. Ontario's law on animal protection must be updated and toughened.

If passed, our Provincial Animal Welfare Act, or the PAW act, will be the first top-to-bottom modernization of the OSPCA act in more than 80 years. Let's put that into some historical context for you. I know the pages will be very, very interested in this, because I was shocked when I first read this. In 1919, the First World War had just ended. At that time, the welfare of both animals and children were the responsibility of the humane society. While child welfare laws have been modernized, until now, animal welfare legislation in Ontario has remained largely unchanged. We are looking to change that. If passed, the changes we are proposing would give Ontario the strongest protection laws in Canada. Of that, this entire House should be very, very proud.

The new Provincial Animal Welfare Act would give the OSPCA the authority to inspect premises where animals are kept for entertainment, exhibition, boarding, sale or hire. This would include zoos, circuses and pet shops. It would give the OSPCA the authority to inspect the premises between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. year-round, to enable inspections to occur in the off-season. They would also be able to inspect the premises at any time they are open to the public. Under our proposed amendments, the OSPCA would also be able to enter almost any non-residential location where they have reasonable grounds to believe an animal is in immediate distress. The proposed act would better protect animals by establishing new provincial offences to target inhumane treatment. These new offences would include causing or permitting distress to an animal; obstructing an OSPCA inspector or agent; failing to comply with standards of care; causing harm to a law enforcement animal; and training or allowing animals to fight other animals. These offences would make Ontario a leader in animal welfare within Canada.

Furthermore, if passed, this legislation would give judges the flexibility to impose the stiffer penalties that these actions deserve. Our current legislation provides a penalty for failure to comply with standards of care for dogs and cats for breeding and sale. Judges will have the jurisdiction to impose a maximum fine of up to $60,000 with up to two years in jail and a potential lifetime ban on owning cats and dogs. Through our proposed amendments, penalties would be established to improve the welfare of all animals, not just cats and dogs.

All too often, veterinarians see the consequences of animal abuse and neglect. Up until now, veterinarians across Ontario have voluntarily reported these suspected cases. At the request of the veterinary profession, the proposed act would make it mandatory for veterinarians to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect. This comes from the veterinarian profession. It would also offer them protection from personal liability for doing so. Ontario would be the only jurisdiction in Canada with this provision. Furthermore, this legislation would respect accepted standards of practice for activities like hunting, fishing and agriculture. Exemptions would be made in consultation with these communities.

Melissa Tkachyk from the World Society for the Protection of Animals called this a "positive new direction." Kate MacDonald, chief executive officer of the OSPCA, said, "We are pleased that the government has recognized the need to modernize and toughen animal welfare laws and create stiffer penalties for those convicted."

I want to thank these and other concerned organizations. I worked with people from Sudbury—Cathy Coe, as an example—from Toronto, Thunder Bay and all over Ontario. They've worked hard to help develop this proposed legislation.

But I look forward to the process continuing. I look forward to this proceeding through second reading. I look forward to this going to committee. If there are ways to even strengthen it further, to expand on what we all want in Ontario, we'll do that; we'll listen carefully to what the presenters say at committee. I look forward to that.

In closing, these changes would go a long way toward protecting animals and punishing those who threaten their welfare. These changes would take Ontario from worst to first in animal protection. Thank you. I turn the floor over to the member from Brant.

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to thank the minister for this opportunity and also repeat what he just said: that this bill will be going to committee.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to speak about Bill 50, a very important piece of proposed legislation to better protect against animal mistreatment and abuse.

While most people enjoy and respect all animals and they do treat their pets as part of the family—with love, care, respect and consideration—unfortunately, it is not uncommon to hear of the acts of uncaring individuals who exploit or harm defenceless animals—and research tells us that the next step is people. Animal abuse has no place in Ontario. That's why our government is proposing to toughen its laws to protect animals.

In August 2007, the McGuinty government announced that it would embark on a review of the very act that

we're proposing today. If passed, the proposed Provincial Animal Welfare Act would provide better protection for animals throughout Ontario, including zoos. I thank the member from Willowdale, David Zimmer, my colleague and friend, for bringing this to the attention of us.

I'd like to briefly speak to the new offences that we're proposing. Ontario is currently the only jurisdiction in Canada without a provincial offence for causing distress to an animal. The only options that the OSPCA has when they find an animal in distress are to remove the animal, make an order that the owner change the conditions the animal is living in—not likely—or impose a Criminal Code charge of animal cruelty. Our proposed changes would improve animal welfare by giving the OSPCA a new option, charging a person with a new provincial offence. This would be a less resource-intensive option that we hope would help the SPCA to lay more charges against those who cause distress to animals and give greater deterrence to avoid future suffering of these purely lovable creatures.

There are currently no penalties for obstructing the OSPCA inspector or agent. Our proposed legislation would establish standards of care of animals. Right now, specific standards of care exist only for keeping cats or dogs for breeding or for sale. Establishing standards of care for all animals would help the OSPCA to ensure that all animals, including those in zoos, are appropriately treated.

To be clear, we're not trying to close roadside zoos. In fact, one in my own riding is an example of how animals are cared for in a roadside zoo. We just want to make sure that everyone in Ontario treats animals well, with love and respect.

This legislation would create a new offence for causing harm to a law enforcement animal. Police dogs and horses can be injured or killed while assisting police in their work. However, they currently don't receive any additional protection. This proposed legislation would make Ontario the only province—and, I hope, not the last—with extra protection for its law enforcement animals. This legislation would also create an offence for training animals to fight other animals or for owning or possessing equipment used in animal fights.

0920

The Criminal Code makes it an offence to engage, aid or assist in fighting or baiting of animals or birds. However, in order to lay a criminal charge, people committing the offence must be caught in the act. That requires raiding dog fights as they are happening—a very dangerous situation. Dog fights usually happen at night and can involve large crowds, making raids risky and difficult. However, if our legislation is passed, people could be charged based on the possession of easily identifiable equipment. It would be safer, require less police officer support and not endanger lives. Most importantly, this approach would allow for changes to be pre-emptive and potentially prevent an animal from suffering injury or being killed in the course of such a fight. Only New Brunswick and Manitoba currently have this provision, and Ontario's will be the most thorough.

Let's take a look at how the proposed changes would affect a few recent incidents. On May 11, 2007, the Windsor/Essex County Humane Society received an anonymous call saying that a dog was in distress at a Windsor apartment building. The OSPCA investigators found a six-month-old German Shepherd-Rottweiler mix whimpering on an apartment balcony, with his ears cut off. The puppy was bleeding, shaking his head and pawing at his ears. The owner was not at home, and the OSPCA seized the dog so it could receive immediate care. The owner later surrendered the dog to the OSPCA. As the law stands, had the owner not surrendered the dog to the OSPCA, it may have been returned to the owner. Under the current law, the OSPCA could only prosecute the owner under the Criminal Code. As a result, investigators were required to determine who had cropped the puppy's ears and whether the harm had been done wilfully, as required under the Criminal Code. Under this new proposed legislation, the OSPCA could have charged the owner with the proposed offence of causing or permitting distress to an animal. Rather than having to prove that the harm was wilful, the OSPCA would only need to determine the owner of the animal and that the mutilation did occur.

The proposed provincial penalties include potential fines of up to $60,000, up to two years in jail and the possibility of a lifetime ownership ban. If the owner refused to surrender the puppy to the OSPCA, the society would also have been able to apply to retain possession of the animal once charges were laid against the owner.

In another case, an Australian tourist raised concerns that a kangaroo named Tyson was being kept in a very small cage at the Lickety-Split Ranch and Zoo in London. Locals told the media that the kangaroo suffered through an eight-month Canadian winter of snowstorms and sub-zero temperatures with only a metal shed to protect it against the cold. Under the current law, the OSPCA was powerless to act as the information was not current enough to get a search warrant. Existing legislation only allows the OSPCA to enter without a warrant if they can observe an animal in immediate distress, but in this case, they could not see the animal. Our proposed legislation would allow the OSPCA to inspect the zoo and take action as appropriate.

Let's look at one more example. Every year, the OSPCA deals with complaints about animals being locked in cars. Right now, the OSPCA can only intervene if they can actually observe the animals in distress. If a cat were locked in the trunk of a car or if a dog were locked behind heavily-tinted windows, the OSPCA would be powerless to help them without a search warrant. If passed, our proposed legislation would mean that the OSPCA would only need reasonable grounds to believe that the animal was in distress in order to intervene.

Those are just a few examples of how, if passed, this legislation would help the OSPCA to protect our beloved animals.

We've already heard today that the OSPCA supports this legislation. We've heard that the World Society for

the Protection of Animals thinks the government is headed in a positive, new and supportable direction. Here's what the veterinarians' organizations have said. The president of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, Dr. Irene Moore, says, "Ontario veterinarians applaud the government for recognizing the need to protect our beloved pets." Susan Carlyle, registrar of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, says, "The College of Veterinarians of Ontario appreciates the government taking steps to improve animal welfare in Ontario, and is pleased that we were consulted and our input valued."

Support like this demonstrates that this government has worked with animal experts across Ontario to develop some of the toughest animal safety standards in the country. However, it's important to note that this legislation would have no impact on people who treat their animals with love, respect and care. The bottom line is this: If you treat your animals well, with love and respect, you will have nothing to fear from this legislation. Animals, however, have absolutely everything to gain. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am pleased to hear the minister acknowledge the work of many members having contributed to this bill coming forward. From our side, from the Progressive Conservative Party, I'm very pleased to indicate that the member from Leeds–Grenville has done a significant amount of work on this, as has the member from York–Simcoe. I think the protection of animals is obviously important to all of us in this place. We've all heard stories of unspeakable cruelty to animals that shouldn't be tolerated in our society, because, as the preamble to Bill 50 states, "The people of Ontario ... believe that how we treat animals in Ontario helps define our humanity, morality and compassion as a society." I would certainly agree with that.

There are some provisions in this bill that are new, that are meant to toughen up the act by allowing—in fact, requiring—veterinarians to report any instances of cruelty to animals, any animals that have been neglected or abused, and also authorizes SPCA inspectors and agents to enter premises without a warrant in any places used for animal exhibit, entertainment, boarding hire, or sale to determine if animals are in distress.

The only thing we have heard about this bill that causes a little bit of concern is, though it's indicated it's not meant to apply to native wildlife and fish or to generally accepted agricultural practices, I would urge the government to allocate significant time for public hearings on this matter so that we can hear from all parties who will be affected or who believe they may be affected by this legislation to make sure that we get a full perspective and understanding of exactly how this legislation is going to be applying. I've certainly heard from a number of my constituents, as I know many members have, who are concerned that this be fulsomely discussed.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly, I rise to support any step forward. We in the New Democratic Party support animal rights and any step forward, and this is a step forward we would support.

However, there are problems with this bill. I would support the member from Whitby–Oshawa when she says this needs fulsome debate and it needs fulsome committee time—in particular, section 6. I've received a number of e-mails, as I'm sure other members of this House have, about the inadequacies of section 6. There's a letter that has gone from the president of the Toronto Humane Society to Mr. Bartolucci on exactly that. He says, "We write to ask you to remove section 6 from Bill 50. Section 6 provides that community-built shelters that either don't want to be affiliates of the Ontario SPCA, or shelters that the Ontario SPCA itself does not want as affiliates, will be stripped automatically of their names by this Legislature." That means that a venerable institution of over 100 years like the Toronto Humane Society would not be able to use the word "humane" anymore, as well as 235 other charities that look after and protect our animals. I don't understand why this section is even in this bill. What is the purpose of it? It needs to be stricken from the bill, and I'd like the committee to look at that.

Some other concerns: There's nothing in the bill for lost animals experimented on in laboratories. There's nothing for animals and birds in the wild. There's nothing for millions and millions of farm animals and birds—and this is not to deter farmers, but we do remember the instance where something like 20 horses were starved to death. This bill would not cover them. Nothing for any other animals that cabinet may decide to exclude in the future. So clearly, this bill needs some tightening up, and clearly, section 6 needs to be omitted from the bill.

We would like to see fulsome consultation with all of those stakeholders, whose concerns are equally valid to OSPCA's, and certainly to have this government take another look at the fine-tuning of this bill.

0930

Mr. Mike Colle: I certainly would like to commend the minister for taking the most decisive step in animal protection in over 90 years. And that is really shameful, that in this province of Ontario for 90 years this outdated act has not been made stronger to protect those who can't protect themselves.

I had a little bit of experience with this myself as to why this hasn't been done. I collected over 200,000 signatures in 2001, trying to close down puppy mills—200,000 signatures—and brought the legislation forward in this House. It was defeated by the majority government at the time. It's just amazing how inept we are as human beings who are supposed to be in government in terms of trying to protect animals.

That's why it's critically important to not underestimate the forces that are opposed to animal welfare protection. They will come up out of the woodwork and have all kinds of excuses as to why this bill isn't quite right. But those who do care about animal protection

welcome this incredible piece of legislation, which gives power—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: Again, members of the NDP are already criticizing the bill, as you can see.

This bill gives the power of inspection. That's all it does. It allows inspection powers, which they don't have, to enter premises to make sure animals are not being abused. That's not there right now. It also ensures that these inspectors can enter without warrant when there is abuse reported. This legislation also ensures that veterinarians have to report abuse. So that is why this legislation is critically important. It's a milestone piece of legislation that deserves full consideration.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, in his opening comments, made a comparison between the child welfare laws and the animal welfare laws in our province.

As the PC critic for community and social services, I can't let this comment go by without reminding the House that this is the same government that refused to enact the amendment brought forward by my Progressive Conservative colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills that would have ensured that individuals who are abused as children and ultimately removed from their abusers and adopted, could not be revictimized. If the Liberals had been concerned with the victims' rights, they would have accepted our PC amendment to block abusers from learning information about their victims.

As the PC critic for community and social services, I've heard from workers who deal every day with victims of domestic violence. Organizations like Family Transition Place have shown that if an individual is inclined to abuse their animal, they are more likely to abuse their spouse or child. Therefore, any legislation that will ensure animal abuse is curtailed and bring fines in line with the level of abuse I'm pleased to support.

I hope that at committee all members will listen and learn from our stakeholders on how we can improve Bill 50, because, clearly, there are some opportunities for amendments and improvements to the existing legislation that will ultimately serve us well. It does us no benefit if we pass bills that six months later we have to bring back to this House and say, "We forgot this little section. We'll try it again." Let's get it right the first time with this one, and we hope that at committee you'll listen and learn from the stakeholders who have some good points that they want to bring forward with Bill 50.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Brant has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dave Levac: First, let me thank those who participated with the two-minute responses: the member for Whitby–Oshawa, the member for Parkdale–High Park, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence, and the member for Dufferin–Caledon.

Let's correct the record. If the member had been listening carefully, she would have recognized that what the minister was talking about was that when the humane societies were created, they took care of both animals and children. That's what he was saying. So in order to get onto a soapbox to talk about a flawed bill, the member didn't quite hear correctly or actually just wanted to use it as an example. But then she carried on about mistakes in the House about certain bills. I don't want to remind her, but since she needs a little bit of a lesson in history, there were seven different bills for a tax bill by the Tories that needed to be corrected.

We don't want to get into this. If you want to get into this, what we're going to do is have a good, solid debate about a bill that has been long overdue, in terms of getting corrected and changed. If you want to start from the premise of talking about children, we're going to say that the humane society's responsibility was for children at the very beginning, at the onset of the legislation.

Let's be clear: This is about trying to get the best possible bill that's going to help us protect our animals. I look forward to the debate. I look forward to hearing the opposition, to hearing their suggestions and recommendations. I also look forward to hearing from all of the stakeholders who want to give input into the piece of legislation. I suspect—and I want to say this gently—that almost everybody who's going to be presenting is going to talk, first and foremost, about the need for us to review this bill, to improve this bill and to protect our animals, because it is a window to our souls. Many great people who have spoken in the past have said that how we treat the animals is how we treat ourselves. I look forward to the healthy debate, and I appreciate the opportunity to present to the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today and speak on the leadoff on second reading debate of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The short form of this is the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008.

You know, as we led up to this particular bill, we had a lot of lobbying that took place by the World Society for the Protection of Animals. I can tell you that when they met us at our offices or when we had phone calls or appointments—even the media advisory leading up to the announcement of Bill 50—I always felt this bill was oriented towards roadside zoos. The announcement came, and there's no question that the word "zoo" is not even mentioned in the bill or in the explanatory note.

That's the first thing I want to know about, because I felt that all the hype in the media—and that's what was on CP24, the different channels, on the TV stations and in the print media, as well as the radio media—was about roadside zoos. I want to talk a little bit about—and there's no question. I hope there's nobody in this provincial Legislature who would want to see any animal, anywhere, mistreated. I did think that Bill 50 would be far more oriented towards kangaroos, leopards and wildlife brought in from other countries which were actually in captivity in small, roadside zoos.

I thought we'd see things in the bill, or even in the announcement, like the height of fencing. When you have, say, a tiger in captivity, you want to make sure you've got the right fence height because of what happened in San Francisco this past winter. You're making sure the animals have proper water, proper feed; making sure that the size of the compound is large enough—they weren't squashed into some little cage—making sure they have shading in the summer, winter shelter and heat; food; and of course the one thing we want to make sure of with all our animals is that we have some veterinary assistance for these zoos.

The bill was hailed as a bill to regulate roadside zoos, but I can tell you that, although the government is very proud of it today, I think we have a few problems with this bill, and I'm going to read out some of the problems with the bill in a few minutes.

0940

I want to tell you three little stories, though, to begin with, because they're all stories that have just taken place recently. The one involves—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Is there anything about the reindeer at the Toronto Zoo? Get to the reindeer.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: There's nothing about the reindeer at the Toronto Zoo.

My oldest granddaughter rides a horse, and I can tell you, it's amazing how animals have an impact on children. When the minister referred to the pages here today—you know, I never would have thought my granddaughter would have been a horseback-riding type of a child, but you know what? She's falling in love with that sport. Every Saturday morning at 9 o'clock—the same time that we started here this morning, by the way—she's out riding her horse at this stable and loves every moment of it.

The minister also mentioned something about law enforcement animals. One thing I want to bring up today is that we have a German shepherd police dog up in the OPP in the Orillia area. His name is Luger, and he's retiring on May 13. I mean, I'm not trying to drag this thing out, but I think it's very important. He's a canine drug dog, and I've seen him at a number of OSPCA events in the past. This dog in particular has solved over 300 cases, where he has actually tracked down the criminal, whether it was through drugs, theft or whatever it may be—over 300 cases. You can imagine the value a dog like that to the Ontario Provincial Police.

Even yesterday, when I was at the police memorial service here at Queen's Park, I can tell you that a number of the police services from across Ontario—I can't recall how many exactly—but a number of them had their police dogs at the police memorial day. As well, there were at least 25 or 30 officers on horses as well.

Of course, the sad story that happened this past weekend was the Kentucky Derby race. I don't know how many people actually saw that this weekend, but the favourite horse won; the horse's name was Big Brown. The only filly in the race placed second, five lengths behind Big Brown and quite a bit ahead of the other contenders in the race, but she broke both her legs at the finish line. It was a pretty sad day in sport to actually see that happen on the TV right in front of your eyes. They had to euthanize her right on the spot. Those were just three things I wanted to add to the debate when we're talking a little bit about animals in general, and three completely different cases.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the OSPCA. I have two branches in my riding: in Midland and Orillia. I attend most of their fundraising events that I can get to. We're building a new branch in Midland, a beautiful new facility, and I'm actually meeting tomorrow with a representative of the OSPCA. We have a member on the board of directors of the OSPCA, Jean Belfour from Orillia, who keeps me in tune. At the meeting tomorrow with Mrs. Belfour, I want to raise a number of issues that have come forward to my office that I'd like to discuss with both the representatives tomorrow and Mrs. Belfour before we get to committee.

On committee, and I think a number of people have brought this up today, there's one thing that's very important that we do: This bill affects rural Ontario, so this can't just be a Queen's Park piece of legislation. We have to travel this bill, and I'm hoping that we're going to see northern, central, eastern and western Ontario, as well as Queen's Park. It would be a shame to have a bill like this go through—especially a bill that the government brags they haven't changed in 90 years. Surely, after 90 years, it would be worth going up to Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, possibly out to Peterborough, Goderich, or some of these communities, and making sure that we can actually debate the bill and listen to the public.

When we did the media event, I had a number of concerns right after that. A few hunters and farmers called—they hadn't heard anything from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture at that point—and I even had a call from one of the humane societies. The bill was promoted and hailed so much as a roadside zoo bill that I actually said to those people, "I don't think there are any problems with this bill. I think it's directed only at roadside zoos, and there should be no problem with it whatsoever." I tried to take away their fears. But then I asked the question in the House—I believe this happened on April 15. I have a number of things I want to read into the record today. The question I asked the minister was this:

"My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, recently you introduced Bill 50, the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, which you hailed as an act to regulate roadside zoos. We're starting to get a few mixed messages on Bill 50.

"Minister, can you explain to the House what impact, if any, this bill will have on those citizens participating in hunting and angling and what impact, if any, Bill 50 will have on farmers and farm animals?"

The honourable minister replied: "I think we were very clear at the press conference when we introduced the legislation that other acts would obviously not be tampered with. We have to ensure that farm animals are regulated by OMAFRA.

"We will ensure that what we're dealing with is the care of animals. We will state what our mandate is. We will ensure that we have the toughest laws in Canada. We will ensure that finally, with the bringing of age of the animal welfare act, we will be able to illustrate and promote legislation that is the best in Canada."

In my supplementary I replied: "Minister, I can't find any local federation of agriculture that is even aware of the contents of this bill. They only heard about it on the day that you made the announcement. As recently as last evening, at an Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters reception here at Queen's Park, I was informed that OFAH has some very real concerns about this bill and has had very little input.

"My question to the minister is: Will you commit to this House today that during the drafting of regulations relating to Bill 50, you will include representatives from hunting, fishing and agricultural organizations and use their expertise in drafting the regulations for this bill?"

His response was this—and this is what I think had a lot of alarm bells go off across some of our stakeholders: "That's a legitimate question," he replied. "It's a question that deserves a legitimate answer"—and I expected a legitimate answer, whatever that means. "Certainly, we had great input from all different stakeholders in Ontario with regard to that. That's why we got back the following endorsements.

"From the World Society for the Protection of Animals"—the people who were lobbying for this bill—"'For years, WSPA has witnessed and fought against the suffering of countless animals in roadside zoos.

"'We look forward to working with the government in this positive new direction.'"

The other example he used was from the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' chief executive officer, Kate MacDonald, the girl who got $5 million two weeks earlier: "'We are pleased that the government has recognized the need to modernize and toughen animal welfare laws and create stiffer penalties for those convicted.'

"We were very inclusive in our consultation. We will continue that as we work through this legislation."

What happened with that particular question in the House is that the minister didn't respond to the question: Could he have hunters and fishermen, or maybe members of a humane society or people from the agricultural community, actually sit and help draft regulations as, say, the legal representatives or whatever? I didn't get an answer to the question. That's when I had a lot of feedback—and the feedback continued to last night, when I got about a 50-page fax from one organization. So if we think the bill is perfect and just needs some tiny amendments, we have some big problems.

For example, here's what the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has put out. Now, I've heard a lot from the local members, like the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture, for example. Dave Riddell called me immediately and I've been trying to work with him. I know a lot of the other members in the House from rural Ontario have had that as well. What I got on Sunday was this: "Mr. Dunlop, further to my voice message left on Sunday, below you will see the OFA has issued an advisory to its constituents." Now, this is from the Ontario federation's board of directors executive staff, county federations, commodity organizations:

"Bill 50 Alert," sent Friday, May 2. "On April 3, the Ontario government introduced Bill 50, amendments to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

The OFA and its partners have been following the development and progress of the amendments. While we do not condone cruelty towards any animal, be they livestock, pets or wildlife, we do believe that the sum of the proposed amendments requires study and clarification, particularly in relation to their impact and/or application to agriculture.

0950

"It is our understanding that second reading debate on Bill 50 will begin Monday, May 5.

"We urge farmers to speak with their MPP and request that Bill 50 be sent to a legislative committee for public hearings following second reading.

"Furthermore, we believe that these public hearings should be held across Ontario to allow farmers, anglers and hunters the opportunity to be heard on Bill 50."

So they're back to what I was saying. The agriculture organizations—and that's from the OFA—are expecting this provincial Legislature to hold these public hearings not only here at Queen's Park, which some people think is the centre of the universe, but outside, in rural Ontario, where there will be many, many impacts of this bill, so we'll have heard of the impacts.

I wanted to say also that I had a lot of feedback from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Right now, they're putting it through their legal department. I'm sure they'll have a number of concerns with the bill, but I'll just read this in:

"The following is a quick summary of the points we raised on the phone earlier today." I was talking to a representative from the OFAH. "I have also attached a copy of the Manitoba act.... The OFA and the OFAC were briefed earlier today by senior government officials. They kept referring to those of us who have concerns about the act as 'alarmists.'" So if you're against the act, you're an alarmist—from the ministry staff.

"There are some good things about the act; for instance, we don't have a problem about the roadside zoos and exotic animals, but the following sums up some of our preliminary concerns."

(1) The act "should adopt the Manitoba approach and Manitoba legislation which has been in place for 12 years. The Manitoba act contains a much clearer definition of 'distress' and the exemptions/exceptions are contained in the act itself, not in its regulations, which are much easier to change to suit. The Manitoba act embodies a much clearer and better approach to the issue than the existing OSPCA act or what is being proposed. (You should know that those briefing OFA suggested that

legislation was much easier to change than regulations, and therefore, by putting the exceptions in the regulations, they are much safer and harder to change"—that's questionable.

"(2) The chief inspector sets the standards for hiring and qualifications for inspectors, but the act contains nothing that speaks to what the chief inspector's qualifications should be."

(3) We "should push to have a qualified veterinarian as chief inspector if the OSPCA is to maintain the enforcement role." That one is an interesting concept.

"(4) The conflict of interest between enforcement responsibilities and fundraising as a non-profit—they use some of the most sensational cases they charge and prosecute as fodder for fundraising.

"(5) Accountability: The OSPCA is not accountable to anyone. They receive public money and are being" given "increased enforcement powers, including warrantless searches, but are accountable to no government body." That's something we'll have to make sure is in the act, that there is accountability there.

"(6) The ministry has suggested that section 11(5) pertaining to obstruction would include vexatious complaints as an example of what would qualify as obstruction under this section, and therefore, the bill protects anglers, hunters and farmers from vexatious complaints. What they fail to note is that the OSPCA accepts anonymous complaints, so are they going to determine what's vexatious or who may be behind it?

"(7) The act refers to fish and animals in the wild. What does this mean for fish in provincial and volunteer hatcheries? Are they exempt?

"(8) The definition of distress is being changed to 'immediate distress,' much more troubling in terms of what this could be interpreted to mean. This is particularly troubling given that OSPCA inspectors will be able to engage in warrantless searches on the basis of 'immediate distress,' whatever that means—and in whose definition?

"These are just a few of the opening concerns we have, and we'll be in a better position to provide more as the process unfolds and we have a strategy in place. We strongly agree that the bill should be subject to a traveling road show, but we will apply to appear before the committee in Toronto. It is clear that the Premier has made a promise to the OSPCA and is attempting to fulfill this in haste, and we appreciate your assistance in slowing down the process to allow for thoughtful debate."

That comes from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Of course, as you know, there are over 80,000 members of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Most of us in rural Ontario have a number of conservation clubs or hunting and angling clubs in our ridings.

I have some more on the OFAH after, but I want to go to the third group that has contacted me, and that was just this weekend—I'm sorry; first of all, it was groups like environmental wildlife centres. They have some concerns as well. I got one call from the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre up in Midland. They have some serious concerns because they have in captivity snakes, turtles and animals you would keep inside. They were wondering just how they would be impacted. I can't even remember all the animals that are there. I see them every time I go by, but I can't remember what they are now; as well, a number of birds—falcons and hawks etc. So that was the third one.

I wanted to get over to the Toronto Humane Society for a minute because there are a couple of things I wanted to read into the record on that. The summary—

Mr. Peter Kormos: The Tim Trow letter.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Yes, we've got lots of Tim Trow letters.

In the summary of what's wrong with Bill 50: It "centralizes what up to now has been community choice.

"Bill 50 turns the current voluntary membership of community humane societies and shelters in the OSPCA into something effectively mandatory because if a shelter doesn't want to join or if, as a member, it is thrown out, its corporate name will be stripped from it by operation of law. This would lead to fundraising damage and difficulty for the public to identify and find services.

"These shelters were built by communities, not government or the OSPCA. Why should the government effectively expropriate the use of their assets and silence their independent voices? Already, and the bill has yet to become law, the OSPCA calls itself 'one voice for animal welfare in Ontario,' notwithstanding that 235 independent animal protection charities are registered for Ontario with the Canada Revenue Agency.

"Will the 'one voice' be friendly to the government? Freedom from municipal taxation—OSPCA ... ongoing funding" of $1.2 million, a grant of $2 million and now $5 million. "How can this not co-opt the animal welfare movement, even if it is not the intention?

"Minister Wynne has been telling people that they have made a governing body. If so, it is riddled with conflict that the government's own Grant Thornton study warned against," and we can see that below.

There is no reform. "The OSPCA act still gives a monopoly and excludes police.

"Why should an animal shelter be forced by the government to mount and pay for a police force and be involved in law enforcement? They are first and foremost caregivers.

"Why doesn't Bill 50 change the prohibition against police helping animals in distress in the OSPCA act, subsection 11(3), to allow communities to have local municipal police help animals in distress rather than to continue to give the OSPCA a monopoly?

"The minister has already allowed the OSPCA to keep bankers' hours, so the police have to stand by when they are off the job. (The OSPCA letter to police chiefs is cleverly deceptive, leaving the impression that the police can help animals in distress when they can't. Sure, the police can enforce the Criminal Code, but the powers under the act won't be used if the OSPCA doesn't use them, and the police can't, under subsection 11(3)).

"No reform: OSPCA remains unaccountable, yet it is a police force.

"No accountability to Queen's Park's institutions of transparency and accountability: OSPCA is not a scheduled agency and is not amenable to the Auditor General, the freedom of information commissioner, the Ombudsman or the Management Board. It is a private and not a public police force, not amenable under the Police Act, unlike normal police forces with police services board, to give public or objective input—all in-house OSPCA.

"Bill 50, section 22(2)(a), will have the chief inspector covered by ministerial regulations for the first time for some things, but it falls short of a wall between the inspectorate and the politics of the OSPCA board, who still hire and supervise him, and won't provide a forum for the public to access. The minister shouldn't be the chief animal cop anyhow. It's silly and unprofessional.

"Operationally unaccountable: See turning away lost animals"—and this is all part of the Grant Thornton report. They "recently closed down Dryden, Kenora and Parry Sound branches, closed the Scarborough branch and substituted a postbox in a strip mall. All this involves less police, not to speak of less help for animals.

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"Who polices the OSPCA" anyway? "Nobody. There is nobody but themselves to write orders to protect animals in distress in their own shelters or to check what they do to animals. They put a private detective on the Toronto Humane Society to spy on us surreptitiously. Their board members themselves, including Devin Strouband, whom the minister invited to sit in the gallery when he introduced Bill 50, personally raided our shelter unannounced, grilled us like animals and grabbed at our confidential medical records.

"No fair internal accountability: As a corporation, section 19 of the Ontario SPCA act lets the board of directors off the hook as if it were a government body and not a private charity where the board should be accountable for its actions and affairs. The board is also effectively immune from lawsuit, with nothing to prevent it from using taxpayer dollars or charitable dollars built up over the years to fend off people aggrieved.

"There is also a board of 12. Ten are elected by the 31 affiliated humane societies and two are also elected by the 31 affiliated humane societies to be representives of branches which have no vote, no matter how tiny the affiliate or how large the branch. This means that Barrie, Brantford, Hanover, Goderich, Chatham, Brockville, Napanee, Midland, Bracebridge, Orangeville, Orillia, Woodstock, Stratford, Petawawa, Scarborough, North York, Cornwall, Sudbury, New Liskeard and York region get no vote and have Ottawa, Hamilton etc. vote for them as if they were children.

"Many branches are large and would be viable as independent affiliates. There is no public accounting as to how much money spent in Newmarket is stripped from them. The minister's own consultant, Grant Thornton, paid for with $100,000 in taxpayers' dollars, said this was unfair, and the minister let the OSPCA rewrite the report maybe even with his ADM"—I'm not sure what that means. "Branches have to accept policing and animal care dictated by Newmarket.

"Bill 50 increases the conflicts of interest in OSPCA governance and at its board by bestowing such power to penalize other humane societies not represented on the board by being able to trigger the stripping of their names and damage their fundraising capabilities.

"OSPCA gets effective control of private charity assets in 31 cities in Ontario. They have already drafted new bylaws they intend to run through their AGM on May 10, 2008"—which, of course, is coming up on Saturday, I guess it is, or Friday—"to include for the first time interference in policy, shelter operations, and charitable donations.

"There is no public accountability for taxpayers' money or requirement that they spend it on animals rather than salting it away in investments.

"Fifteen years ago, the OSPCA owned 50 acres on Yonge Street in Aurora. They made millions when they sold it. Where has it gone and why do they cry poor all the time? The government hired Grant Thornton, who told them to stop pouring taxpayers' money into the OSPCA until it was more accountable. What new accountabilities did the government get before pouring in the latest $5 million?

"One thing Bill 50 is not just is a 'modernizing' of language, as the minister told Peter Worthington. It is a huge change brought about without public consultation. In our case, it was a phony consultation. The Toronto Humane Society met with the minister a week before he introduced the bill and he didn't even hint at this.

"The bill also doesn't acknowledge in exploratory notes or in the bill itself that the bill covers up the likely unconstitutionality of section 10 of the OSPCA act that may colour what it does. (It is unconstitutional because it prohibits individuals from associating to help animals, making it illegal for a few ladies, for example, to feed hungry birds etc. Freedom of association is a fundamental right under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.)

"It gets cabinet off the hook from having to annul the OSPCA bylaws if they are not proper under subsection 7(3) of this act. We asked the minister to look into this and assure us they were legal and not ultra vires, and he refused.

"Bill 50 also solves the fights, some legal and with lawyers, in favour of the OSPCA that the OSPCA is having with small humane societies that aren't even members of the OSPCA in Marathon, Manitouwadge, Burlington, Mississauga, Picton and Collingwood that the OSPCA is trying to force to drop the 'humane society.'

In summary on this part: The minister can't say he is unaware of things at the OSPCA because he has a civil servant, Mr. Mike Zimmerman, 'embedded' at the OSPCA. He is part of ... their board meetings and even audits inspector training."

So those are some of the comments that came from one organization, the Toronto Humane Society. As you

can see, they're quite concerned about where we're actually going with this.

Now, that gets me over to—how much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Ten minutes.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Am I down to 10 minutes?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): No, no; you've got 31 minutes.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I know the government put out this announcement on April 1 around the funding of the OSPCA, and it reads: "The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals will use a one-time capital grant of $5 million from the Ontario government to upgrade its facilities and computer systems. The society will also improve its services in northern communities. The provincial grant is part of Ontario's plan to strengthen the province's animal welfare system. Last August, the government increased funding for the OSPCA to $500,000 per year, an increase of more than 400%. The province provided the funds to support the training of inspectors and agents. The government also provided $100,000 to help the OSPCA work with the Ministry of Natural Resources to put in place an interim zoo inspection plan."

My question now, and I hope some of the members of the government can help me with this in the summary or when we get to committee hearings, but I'm really concerned about how much other humane societies received across the province. Is all the money, the $5 million—I'm not aware of any other organization getting any money from the Ontario government. I was curious if we could get that clarified.

Mr. Peter Kormos: What about the cricket club?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No, I'm talking about the humane societies and the other branches. Certainly, there is a lot of fundraising that takes place in all of these organizations, and I want to make sure that we'll actually find out the true answers to that.

As well, starting on Saturday, a very interesting article came out from Peter Worthington in the Toronto Sun. He's written a number of articles over the last few years. He loves animals and pets etc. He wrote an article, and I felt that it was such a good article, we should read it into the record, because it really does sum up a lot of the things that I expect we will hear at the committee hearing.

"Fighting Like Cats and Dogs: Animal Welfare Groups at Odds over Who May Use 'Humane Society.'"

This is on a number of websites now, but I think it's important.

"At the first reading on April 3 of Bill 50—to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act—there was wide approval for updating the 90-year-old legislation.

"Sentences for cruelty to or abuse of animals were stiffened, standards imposed on so-called 'roadside zoos' where none existed before. To the uninitiated, or unwary, the future of animals looked encouraging.

"Hugh Coghill, chief inspector with the Ontario SPCA, emotionally called it 'a great day for the animals.'

"Maybe. Then again, maybe not.

"Largely unnoticed in Bill 50 is the revision of section 10 in the old act that says no society, association or group 'established after the 30th day of May, 1955,' shall function as an animal welfare or cruelty prevention organization 'unless it is incorporated and becomes affiliated' with what then was the Ontario Humane Society and is now renamed the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA).

"Thus, animal welfare bodies in business prior to 1955 seemed to escape domination by the OSPCA, which has been rent asunder in recent years by controversy, weak finances, mass resignations, internal feuds, etc.

"Section 10 in the new act is revised to say only groups affiliated with the OSPCA shall 'use the name "humane society" ... or "spca" or the equivalent of any of those names ...'

"Giving the OSPCA control over the name 'humane society' (which it has dropped and no longer uses) has caused alarm among some, who believe it gives the OSPCA undue power to threaten and intimidate.

"The Toronto Humane Society (THS) has feuded over the years with the OSPCA. Although it has been in existence for 121 years and is a beloved Toronto institution, the THS feels vulnerable with this amended clause.

"'It means that if we break our affiliation with the OSPCA, or they kick us out for any reason, by this new law we could lose our name—a name that has meant goodwill and trust for generations, and is essential to our fundraising,' says Tim Trow, president of the THS.

"'Donations from the public and gifts are our only source of funds. We get no grants, no handouts from government.'

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"Last week, Trow wrote to Rick Bartolucci, Ontario's Minister of Community Safety, urging the removal of the inflammatory section from Bill 50. He called it 'an insurmountable conflict of interest because the Ontario SPCA will become both regulator and fundraising competitor to its 32 affiliates.'

"He said Bill 50 will, 'upon enactment, strip the names and identities of other charities amongst the 235 Ontario animal protection charities registered with the Canadian Revenue Agency.'

"The Toronto Humane Society depends on the OSPCA for inspectors in animal abuse cases. Other than the police, they are the only ones licensed to carry out investigations and lay charges. There's rarely disagreement when abuses are found. But Trow accuses the OSPCA leadership of hiring private detectives to check up on the Toronto Humane Society, including surreptitious interviews of staff.

"'The OSPCA has a poor record with saving animals, and always needs money, and would love to get its hands on the Toronto Humane Society's fundraising abilities,' says Trow.

"'Put bluntly, our name is our greatest asset. If we had to change our name after 121 years, it would be devastating.

"'Last year we had an enviable record for saving animals—75% of our dogs and cats were adopted; our euthanasia rate was 6%,'" which is very low. "'The OSPCA won't tell how many it adopts and how many it kills.' (The euthanasia rate at the Toronto Animal Services—the pound, in other words—is roughly 50%, a far cry from the THS's, which is 6%."

"Those who think the OSPCA would never move against the Toronto Humane Society might consider what's happening in Burlington. In 1974, Animal Aid was formed after the Burlington Humane Society (affiliated with what is now the OSPCA) quit in 1970 over a dispute with the city's animal shelter program to sell animals for research.

"Animal Aid took over the role, and the name, of 'humane society' and ever since has functioned as such. In 1999, the Hamilton SPCA decided to include Burlington, to form a joint SPCA, even though it has no shelter in Burlington. Local people will have to depend on the present Burlington Humane Society.

"The Hamilton-Burlington SPCA has threatened to sue the Burlington Humane Society, but until the new OSPCA act, there was nothing to prevent Burlington using the 'humane society' name.

"Jolene Regan, president of the all-volunteer BHS, says the membership approved, and 'Burlington Humane Society' became their legal name, filed with Industry Canada and incorporated in 2006.

"'We have good working relations with the city and with the city's animal control shelter,' says Regan. 'Hamilton's interest in Burlington is because we're a relatively affluent community for fundraising.'

"Like Burlington, the Mississauga Humane Society is volunteer-based and unaffiliated with the OSPCA, which has a reputation of being dogmatic and dysfunctional, a view shared by the Toronto Humane Society leadership.

"Regan is concerned the Hamilton SPCA has a 'zero-kill' policy—it will not put down any animal. This means it will not accept most sick or injured animals but directs them to the city's animal control services, which shares the same building with the Hamilton SPCA.

"It's cruel to keep some animals alive, says Regan. 'You try to help them all, but some can't be saved.'

"In other words, the Hamilton SPCA accepts healthy animals for adoption, while sick or unwanted animals go to animal control for execution.

"Like the Toronto Humane Society, Regan worries that the wording on the new SPCA act gives the OSPCA a weapon to prevent the use of the name 'humane society.'

"A spokesperson for Bartolucci says the controversial wording in Bill 50 is mere 'modernizing of the language and not intended to change the existing situation.' The intent is to have better control over cruelty and abuse of animals, and not to prevent people caring for animals.

"He didn't think banning organizations from using the word 'humane society' unless they were affiliated with the OSPCA posed a danger to, say, the Mississauga and Burlington humane societies, which are independent (as are the Marathon, Collingwood and Picton humane societies), or Toronto, which is affiliated but which the OSPCA envies and resents.

"If the ministry believes this, it doesn't understand the issue.

"To avoid a snakepit of future controversy, before the next reading of Bill 50, the words 'humane society' should be removed from the sentence that says the OSPCA has sole disposition on who can use that name.

"It's ludicrous, when one thinks about it. Both the OSPCA and Hamilton have abandoned the 'humane society' identification for themselves, but want to prevent any except those affiliated with them from using it.

"Bartolucci is to be commended for updating the act, but he should familiarize himself with the OSPCA's turmoiled history, and that in the past it has proved unreliable in dealing judiciously with power."

That's what I read from Mr. Peter Worthington, who wrote that article in the Toronto Sun, I believe on Saturday.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You've still got 21 minutes. You may have to read it again.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No, I've got lots to read here. I hope it's not too painful, Peter. Quite frankly, I'm really looking forward to the NDP's leadoff time of one hour as well.

Also on a website, I believe from the Toronto Humane Society:

"Urgent—Bill 50 Flawed—Urgent.

"Let's work together in asking the provincial government to rethink and withdraw section 6 of Bill 50." I think this was mentioned a little bit earlier.

"Section 6 of Bill 50 will result in community shelters that either don't want to be affiliated with the Ontario SPCA, or shelters that the Ontario SPCA itself doesn't want as affiliates, being stripped automatically of their names by the Legislature.

"It could happen to the Toronto Humane Society or other any other humane society across the province, without a hearing procedure or appeal to the courts provided for in the bill.

"Losing your name is losing your identity. Fear of being stripped of names used in communities for generations will stifle debate and discussion.

"The Ontario SPCA favours one voice for animal welfare in Ontario, but we know that our strength as a movement is in its many voices. We ask the Ontario SPCA to rethink its support for Bill 50, which could result in hurting other humane societies.

"Ontario's animal welfare movement does not belong to the government or to the Ontario SPCA. It belongs to the communities that built shelters without government or OSPCA money, organizations which have earned the right to call themselves 'humane societies' and the right to speak out on their own on the issues of the day."

They want everyone to contact their MPPs on this particular issue. It's on the Toronto Humane Society's website.

Mr. Speaker, you know that recently there has been a petition floating around the House, and I want to put that on the record as well. I know these will all come back a little later on when we get to committee, but I want to make sure that this is read into the record, and we can add some more a little later on. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Provincial Animal Welfare Act calls for the Ontario SPCA, a private charity, whose objective is to facilitate and provide for the prevention of cruelty to animals and their protection and relief therefrom; and

"Whereas every inspector and agent hired and trained by this private charity has and may exercise any of the powers of a police officer; and

"Whereas this private charity does not answer to the Ombudsman or the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Ontario SPCA is not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and no external mechanism of accountability exists; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refused to investigate the desperate plea of 29 resigned directors demanding that the Ontario SPCA be stripped of police powers"—in May 2006—"and

"Whereas the McGuinty government proposes sweeping reforms to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act granting further extraordinary powers to the Ontario SPCA, including the power of warrantless entry;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to investigate allegations of abuse of police powers and charter violations by the Ontario SPCA investigators; and

"(2) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to explore the need for an external mechanism of accountability for the Ontario SPCA; and

"(3) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to ensure that proposed changes to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act do not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

That is a petition that's been floating around the province, and it has had a great impact on this particular bill.

There has been a lot of correspondence between the minister's office and the Toronto Humane Society. I believe Ms. DiNovo had mentioned it a little bit earlier, but I wanted to read that letter in as well.

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"The Honourable Rick Bartolucci"—

This was on April 29 of this year.

"Dear Minister Bartolucci:

"Re: An open letter to Ontarians concerning Bill 50, Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008.

"We write to ask you to remove section 6 from Bill 50. Section 6 provides that community-built shelters that either don't want to be affiliates of the Ontario SPCA, or shelters that the Ontario SPCA itself does not want as affiliates, will be stripped automatically of their names by the Legislature.

"Historically in Ontario, the many voices of the province's animal welfare movement have been its strength. If the result of Bill 50 is but one voice, Bill 50 will have stifled debate and diversity and will have weakened what has been built up in communities over generations.

"Bill 50's role for the Ontario SPCA appears to be one of insurmountable conflict of interest because the Ontario SPCA will become both regulator and fundraising competitor to its 32 affiliates.

"In addition, Ontario's animal welfare movement is wider than the Ontario SPCA or its affiliates. Bill 50 will instantly, upon enactment, strip the names and identities of other charities among the 235 Ontario animal protection charities registered with the Canada Revenue Agency.

"Bill 50 provides for no decision-making process and no appeal to the courts. It provides no explanation as to why it is necessary for the Legislature to take away the identities of any charities.

"Sanctions against holding out or infringing a corporate name already exist in Ontario law. In the case of the Toronto Humane Society, there can be no confusion because there is no similarity between 'The Toronto Humane Society' and the 'Ontario SPCA.'

"The Toronto Humane Society is a well-known Ontario landmark, a hospital and a shelter, caring for both wild and domestic animals. We employ 150 caregivers, and, at any time, 500 volunteers provide recuperative or palliative care as foster parents, feed orphan kittens in the nursery, groom cats, or walk dogs.

"We serve province-wide, one-third of our clients coming to us from beyond our Toronto area.

"The Toronto Humane Society has grown and prospered since 1887 because of the generous support of financial contributors and members. We do not receive, and never have received, government funding or funding from the Ontario SPCA.

"Our name is how we have been identified for 121 years. It has been entrusted to us by successive provincial governments and it represents the goodwill and trust of generations.

"Our name is how we speak to supporters and donors, and it is how they identify us in their wills or in other giving. It is how volunteers and animal caregivers find us and it is how clients access our services—rescuing animals, reuniting lost animals, saving injured wildlife, providing veterinary care, extending shelter and providing homes.

"Take away our name and identity and you jeopardize our ability to provide essential animal care to citizens when they are desperate and in need.

"Please remove section 6 from Bill 50.

"Thank you."

That's signed by Tim Trow, the president of the Toronto Humane Society.

I think you'll see a lot of that letter circulating over the next few weeks as we get into committee etc. and actually start to debate it. I know that organizations like the Toronto Humane Society have a great deal of respect across our country. In fact, I believe all of the animal shelters have a great deal of respect across our country and our province. I hope we can listen to some of these concerns.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the exemptions. This goes back to section 8 of the bill, section 11.2 of the act. The exceptions are subsections on the "exception" to this bill:

"(a) native wildlife and fish in the wild in prescribed circumstances or conditions;

"(b) activities carried on in accordance with reasonable and generally accepted practices of agricultural animal care, management or husbandry; or

"(c) a prescribed class of animals or animals living in prescribed circumstances or conditions, or prescribed activities."

When you see something that vague in the exceptions, that is why you'll see a lot of organizations like the Toronto Humane Society, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the OFA—you can see why they have a lot of worry with this. That's why I asked the question to the minister about why they would not be part of the committee that actually helped to draft the regulations. I just can't see the loss for the government on that. I think it would be something that would show a lot of care and a lot of interest from the general community as they move forward with that.

As the minister said earlier, and I think the parliamentary assistant said as well, it has been 90 years since we've had a bill like this, or since we've done major work on this particular legislation. If it has been 90 years, this may require summer travel. I'm not too sure how the other parties feel about that. But if we're not able to do appropriate travel with this bill between now and the end of June, I would hope that they would agree to travel with the bill. I'm thinking of communities like Sudbury, the Soo, Thunder Bay, North Bay, some of those communities up there; eastern Ontario, Peterborough or Cornwall, something like that; perhaps Barrie or Orillia in that area, Newmarket; western Ontario, Goderich or Strathroy, some of those communities.

There are a lot of opportunities to move this bill around. I believe many amendments will be coming. I told the parliamentary assistant at the—this parliamentary assistant here. Are there two parliamentary assistants to the Ministry of Community Safety? Okay, there are. I told him on the Christopher's Law bill that I felt we would have a lot of amendments to this bill. We went along, we basically agreed, with everything in the Christopher's Law amendments. It was a bill that was easily passed.

I think we'll be more serious about this one. I think we're going to need to take the time to get this bill right. After 90 years, if major amendments are required, I think we have to listen all of the stakeholders and work as best we can on that. We should try to get it right. As the OFAH has said, they believe the federal legislation and the Manitoba legislation really get it right. I think it took 11 years to get the federal legislation the way they actually wanted it. I think it would be really very positive if we could move in that direction.

I wanted to also, while I have the floor—this is one bill I don't think we can blame on the federal government. It's not their fault, anyway. Is it?

Mr. Dave Levac: Yeah.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Oh, it's the federal government's fault. I'm so used to everything that comes down to being the federal government's fault. Blame it on Jim Flaherty. This is one we can't say is Mr. Flaherty's or Mr. Hunter's fault.

The minister is bringing this bill forward, and we're going to do the best we can to try to support this. We want the proper amendments. We want to make sure that all these stakeholders are listened to, as I've pointed out, and I've got a lot more I could read into the record.

We want to make sure we go ahead with this and do it in a very positive manner. No one in this House wants to see the distress of any animals, whether they're in captivity or in the wild. But the minister continues to fight with the federal government.

I go back to the policing situation, where the federal government—it's not their responsibility, but out of a good message to Canadians, they made a campaign promise, and they have delivered on that promise to provide 2,500 new police officers to this country.

Each time the minister speaks anywhere, or if he answers a question in the House, he condemns the federal government for coming up with $156 million to help policing. I don't know how you can complain about another level of government giving you money that they're not required to give you. The money that's required for law and order is the duty and responsibility of the province of Ontario in this case.

I've got to tell you, I had a number of police officers yesterday ask me how the $156 million is being spent and when we will begin to see some of the 1,000 police officers required for Ontario: 500 for the OPP and 500 for non-municipal contract policing to other police services. I think there had to be 4,000 or 5,000 police officers at Queen's Park yesterday. Over the barbecue we had after, and prior to it, many of the police officers from different associations and the OPP etc. mentioned to me that they were all concerned about when that money would be spent.

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If the province would put money in this year and use part of the fifth of the money coming from the federal government, it could put 200 police officers on the streets of Ontario by the end of the budget year 2008-09. If they did that each year, they would use up the $156 million, and at the end of five years we would have 1,000 additional police officers on the streets of our province.

I think we in this House should support the federal government and the work it has done to bring forward

this program. It would certainly help our police services across Ontario if we quit battering away, every time we get a chance, at the federal government and started supporting them in what I believe is a very positive initiative. It's not something you can finger-point on anymore; it's something that we have to take advantage of.

In conclusion—I'm just about out of time here—

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, no. You've got five minutes.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's hard to carry on very long in this—

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm getting stronger and stronger in my riding, to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. I know they want me to use my full time.

I've never had a lot of pets in my life. We've had a couple of dogs and a cat, but most of my family members have cats and dogs. We have a new golden retriever named Happy in my daughter's family, and he's beautiful.

Nobody wants to see any animal under any kind of punishment or cruelty or distress. I think, as we work our way through this legislation, we'll want to make sure that the people are listened to. When we get out there, when we get on our road show and we visit all these different communities—and I really hope we will do that—we'll listen to animal shelters, the roadside zoo people. I didn't get a chance to talk to you a little bit earlier about the roadside zoo just south of my riding. It's actually in Speaker Wilson's riding. It's the Elmvale Jungle Zoo. They have had customers there for decades, as far as I know. I have never heard a complaint about the place. There may be, for all I know, but it's certainly not a business that has been under the microscope by any one particular group of people, whether it be the OSPCA or the police, or even farm organizations. I may get some e-mails on it now; maybe there have been some problems. But it looks like they have large fields, high fences, and I would have to say that the animals are well looked after at the Elmvale Jungle Zoo.

In a perfect world, all of our zoos, all of our animals that are kept in captivity, would have state-of-the-art locations. I hope that in the end the government and the people drafting the regulations for Bill 50 will work very closely with the roadside zoos, not to try to get out there and put them out of business but to give them some time, maybe even some incentives to spend money properly, to spend money in a manner that they can accommodate the animals held in those zoos and make them good tourist attractions and profitable little businesses as well, at the same time making sure that all animals held in captivity in the large zoos or small zoos are looked after in a humane manner.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this time to thank you for the opportunity to say a few words today to Bill 50. It has been a long, painful morning to get through this first hour, but we do our job here to try to get all the points on the record. I can just tell you that although Bill 50 is basically supported by people in this House, there are a lot of amendments to come. We need to make sure that we get this bill right and we don't fool around, pass it quickly and then find out, like some of the other legislation we've had here, that we're back amending it six months from now. We want to make sure that we get it right the first time, and that means listening to the public, the humane societies, the farmers, the hunters, the fishermen, anybody that has anything to do with protecting our animals and our wildlife—making sure we send a positive message that, after 90 years, we will get this bill right, and that we will get it right in the final passing of third reading.

I want to put on the record that I really hope—and I have put it on the record earlier in this speech—that we can travel with this bill and not just get to one of these subcommittee meetings and say, "We'll have one location in Newmarket and the rest of the meetings at Queen's Park." This bill needs to be travelled. It does affect rural Ontario. It does affect small businesses. It will send a message to rural Ontario that we actually care about them here if we can travel with this bill.

Listen to the farm organizations. I know that the people at the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture would love to make a deputation, as well as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I'm sure all the members of this House who are from communities with federations of agriculture will want to have their representatives there as well, pointing out their different concerns and how this bill may in fact help or hinder those animals that are kept on farms, or the fish, birds and wildlife that people hunt through the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

With that, I appreciate this opportunity. I look forward to further debate and the comments on my fabulous speech that I made here this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened with interest to my friend from Simcoe North. He raised, in an exhaustive way, I believe, all the problems with this particular bill. Again, what we have here is Liberal spin, government spin. Certainly, it's an inch forward for animals, but in particular with section 6, it's a ruling on behalf of the OSPCA. It makes one wonder whether there are Liberal members on the board of the OSPCA, because it certainly rules in favour of them.

Also, I'd like to introduce to the House Tim Trow, president of the Toronto Humane Society, whom we have here, and members of the Toronto Humane Society in the House today. We're honoured to have their presence. You've heard his letter to Mr. Bartolucci read out here. We, on their behalf, but also on behalf of many members of our constituencies, are demanding that section 6 be reworked, that it in fact be deleted from this bill. It's not necessary. It has nothing to do with the protection of animals; in fact, it goes against the protection of animals.

Mr. Trow, president of the Toronto Humane Society, wrote on their website:

"Dear friend of the animals:

"Now is the time for humanitarians across Ontario to stand together.

"Each of us should email our own MPPs urging removal of section 6 from Bill 50. We owe it to the animals who cannot speak for themselves and who will need us to speak out for them in the future as we have done in the past."

I also want to thank my sister from Dufferin–Caledon who corrected me on my last two-minute hit: Apparently it was 50 horses that were abused on a farm. Again, this bill does nothing for them. These were not owned by a farmer, by the way. Farmers tend to look after their animals better; they depend on them. These were owned by a lawyer. I suggest that perhaps if there were more farmers in the House and less lawyers, we might get more action here.

Nothing for lost animals experimented on in laboratories; nothing for any other animals that cabinet—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: Just listening to the member speak, a few things came to mind. This legislation has not been strengthened in 90 years. He talked about haste. Well, it's been 90 years that we've been waiting for animal protection in this province.

He didn't speak about the fact that there are people who are operating all kinds of breeding businesses without any regulation and without any restrictions. You need a licence to own a dog in Toronto, for instance, but you don't need a licence to breed thousands of animals. No licence is required.

No inspection: You could be breeding cats or dogs, and no inspection is allowed to see if the conditions are clean.

People are also engaged in animals for profit. They are training dogs and fowl to fight. Dogfighting and cockfighting take place in this province and no one does anything about it. It's allowed right now to train these animals to kill each other. This bill for the first time stops that.

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It allows inspection of these mills that are operating all across this province. It also ensures that the roadside zoos that are popping up everywhere are allowed to be inspected. The members opposite don't talk about that. This is long overdue protection for animals. They talk about federations and they talk about lawyers. They talk about all these interest groups. They don't talk about the fact that there are animals that are unable to defend themselves and we, as a government, for the first time in 90 years, are trying to do something—and they squabble about lawyers and federations. What about the animals that can't speak for themselves?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 50 and I compliment the member for Simcoe North on his comments. Some of the areas that are of concern are these roadside zoos that we're hearing about. I don't believe any member in this House is opposed to making sure that animals have proper care and concern over them. But where are the roadside zoos? Having worked somewhat on this file in the past, I can see a movement toward an area that I think all members should be concerned about: Where is this standard going to for roadside zoos or zoos in general?

My understanding is that currently, in the province of Ontario, there are only two places that would be acceptable. Those would be the Toronto Zoo and, potentially, the African Lion Safari, with some modern changes to it. They may be the only acceptable locations in the province to meet that standard.

The difficulty there is that we don't know the locations of these so-called roadside zoos. Effectively, the member for Peterborough should have concern about what will take place at that particular location, and also the impact on the Bowmanville Zoo, the oldest private zoo in North America, which Mr. O'Toole, the member for Durham, constantly mentions. As well, it creates a standard of care that causes some concern, by which these locations provide a great service in our communities. Quite frankly, there are a number of us who have some concern for the rearing of the animals in those areas, and that needs to be addressed.

Also, what would take place with the impact of adoptions of animals in a number of facilities or service providers out there? Will this create a record and a filing of locations that are now going to be receptive for inspections to ensure—as was the case in California. An individual all of a sudden had the animal removed because one of the movie stars, a famous individual, could no longer comply or was not supposed to comply with caring for an animal under the guise of what was taking place in that jurisdiction. I believe there's a lot of concern and we have to make sure it goes through the committee process.

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to take a moment to thank the member opposite for some of the on-the-record comments that others have made and for the fact that he's been able to articulate all of those concerns that are being raised. I made the commitment earlier in my speech, and I'll make it again, that we are definitely going to committee. We're going to consider all of the concerns that are being raised. As a tradition in this place, when we do go to committee, the subcommittee will make those decisions and the House leaders will have the discussions about how that's going to happen, and I respect that.

What I would also suggest to you is that, as was said before, these improvements are not inching forward. These improvements are going to be quite dramatic in terms of the protection of animals in our province. Respecting the hard work of all of those organizations over the years is what this bill will attempt to do. Nobody has a monopoly on how to care for an animal, and I respect that. I want to make sure it's clear that these organizations' comments and the input that they give will be done in a respectful way.

The second point that I want to make is the respect I have for my colleagues on all sides of the House who have previously introduced private members' bills that speak to the very essence of what this bill is trying to get to, and that is the way we treat our animals.

In terms of our relationship with the animals in the world, we need to improve. With this type of legislation that's being put before us, it's a step forward in terms of our recognition that we must get better at how animals are treated, regardless of where they are. The member also knows about the exemptions that are being offered in the legislation to ensure that other pieces of legislation from other ministries and other levels of government will take care of some—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Simcoe North for the response.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Parkdale–High Park, Eglinton–Lawrence, Oshawa and Brant for their comments.

In summary, I think what we really wanted to get on the record today is, first of all, to comment to the House that we want extensive committee hearings on this bill. It's a bill that hasn't had major work done on it in over 90 years. We really do want to make sure we get it right. I plead with the members of the government to make sure that we listen to agricultural organizations, that we listen to hunting, fishing and angling organizations and to some of our humane societies, and use their expertise as we proceed in helping the government draft their regulations. I know that there will be many amendments that'll take place here in this House with this bill. I hope the government will listen to those amendments, and in fact, they've probably come up with a number of amendments already that they may want to see.

All of us support the protection of animals. We don't want any animals being mistreated cruelly and distress to these animals. So it's incumbent on all of us to get this bill right the first time, not to fool around with it for 10 or 15 years but to make sure that we get it right the first time and make sure the amendments will protect our animals and our shelter organizations many, many decades into the future.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I move unanimous consent for all members to wear a green ribbon, which are in the galleries, to support Children's Mental Health Week.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is there agreement for wearing the green ribbons? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I now call for introduction of members—of visitors, pardon me. Well, introduction of members: Welcome. It's nice to see everybody one here bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.

It's especially nice to see our good friend the Minister of Government Services back. Welcome back, Ted.

I remind the members that under the new standing orders you are supposed to have these in my hands one hour in advance.

On behalf of the member from Mississauga-Erindale, I would like welcome students from Christ the King Catholic school in Mississauga who are visiting the Legislature today.

On behalf of the members from Ajax–Pickering, Pickering–Scarborough East and Scarborough–Agincourt, I would like to welcome the champion foursome from a charity golf tournament in the "average age over 80 years" category to the east members' gallery today: Don Sutton from Whitby, Fred Mason from Oshawa, Michael Bridgman from Pickering and Ted Arnts from Pickering.

On behalf of page Sheilagh Brenegan, the following guests are visiting this morning in the west members' gallery: her mom, Louise Hart, her grandmother Mavis Hart, her grandfather Duncan Hart, and her father, Allan Brenegan.

On behalf of page Jack Aloise, the following guests are visiting this morning in the west members' gallery: his father, Gerry Aloise, his mother, Patti Aloise, his brother Michael and his sister Nicole.

Welcome to all the guests and the other guests who are visiting Queen's Park today.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's great to see some children in the gallery here for the first early question period. I know they're from the 905; I don't think other parts of the province will have the same opportunity.

The question is to the Premier on Ontario's last-place economy. Your answer in the House last week when we raised the issue of increasing number of manufacturing job losses: You said—it's in Hansard—there's more to come. That was your prediction—no solution, no hope, no leadership, just what appears to be complete surrender while this great province just spirals to last place in Confederation.

In light of the fact that this is Emergency Preparedness Week, can you tell us and the people of Ontario where your emergency plan for Ontario's economy is, or are you just going to sit on the sidelines and complain to others?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Good morning to you, Speaker. It's a wonderful opportunity to receive this question from my colleague opposite. Of course, he chooses to frame our perspective on this in a certain way, and I understand that's where he's coming from.

I think we should keep a few facts in mind. For one thing, in January, February and March of this year, we

are ahead 57,300 jobs. That's a net job gain in Ontario of 57,300 more jobs, and 97% of those were created in the private sector. In the last four and a half years, we are ahead 455,000 net new jobs, and 80% of those are full-time positions.

It is true that we have been losing manufacturing jobs, but I just don't want Ontarians to lose sight of the big picture. We are, overall, ahead, and we are still moving ahead.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I've suggested in the past that the Premier's in what appears to be a permanent state of denial about the situation in the economy in this province, and we're not alone in that—although we in the Progressive Conservative Party have consistently said that there is a way to stimulate our economy and provide hope to Ontario's families and businesses. We've talked about the immediate elimination of the capital tax, reducing government regulation, lowering corporate tax rates across the board. The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, chaired by Roger Martin, funded by your government, has said virtually the same thing. This is high-paid advice, paid for with hard-earned taxpayers' dollars. You are ignoring it, essentially, and I think Ontarians deserve to know why.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Conservative Party continues to put forward its simplistic, anachronistic, one-point plan. They maintain that all that ails us can be remedied through a dramatic reduction in taxes. They would have us take $5 billion by way of taxes out of the mix. What they don't like to say is what the consequences are that would flow from that dramatic, reckless cutting of taxes. They don't like to talk about hospital closures. They don't like to talk about reductions to the funds we put into our schools. They don't like to talk about the reductions in supports for our most vulnerable. They don't like to talk about the reductions in the supports we put in recently that invest in the skills and education of workers who've been losing their jobs. They don't like to talk about any of those things. They don't like to reference the fact that we just cut, retroactively, $190 million by way of capital taxes, to put that money directly into the hands of our manufacturers and resource-based sectors to give them support right now. They don't like to talk about any of those things.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: All those people the Premier just referenced are hurt the most when Ontario's economy goes down the tubes. That's the reality.

It's not just our advice and Roger Martin's you're ignoring. Your former finance minister in 2004 said, "People pay attention to the level of taxation in Ontario to make investment decisions as to whether they're going to invest in the province ... create jobs and more economic prosperity."

You've ignored our advice. You've ignored the advice of Roger Martin, your own adviser-consultant. You've ignored Mr. Sorbara and who knows how many others. We have to wonder who the Premier is taking advice from. We talk about a possible recession, we know we're entering have-not status in this province, but you get up on your feet time after time—you are something of a serial denier. Maybe you're a secret member of the Flat Earth Society. I don't know. But we have a right to know and the people of this province have a right to know what your plan is to deal with the deteriorating situation in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to restate the fundamentals of our five-point plan for the benefit of the leader of the Conservative Party. First of all, we are cutting business taxes. We've eliminated capital taxes for manufacturers in the resource sector retroactive to January 2007. That means $190 million in immediate rebates. We're investing heavily in infrastructure—$60 billion over the course of 10 years. We are repairing, expanding and renovating schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, courthouses, housing and the like, like never before. That's creating jobs in the short term, and it's enhancing our productivity in the long term. We are investing heavily in innovation, doing much more so we can move more quickly to commercialize our ideas and turn those into jobs. We continue to partner with business. Again, this is something the Conservative Party opposes. We are partnering with business so we can create more jobs here. Finally, and most importantly, we are continuing to invest in the skills and education of our people, something they don't believe that we should be doing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: If you look at the Roger Martin reports over the last number of years, if you listen to the advice of C.D. Howe, if you listen to the advice of many other economists across this country, you'll realize that many of the decisions you've taken over the past four and a half years have been bad for the economy and have placed us in the position we're currently in. If Ontario's economy were growing 1% or even half a percent more than it is now, we wouldn't be in last place. The unemployed workers in Oshawa and Leamington wouldn't be wondering today if they're going to be able to pay their mortgages or feed their kids.

When will the Premier start to take some degree of responsibility for the contribution his decisions have had in terms of Ontario's dead-last position?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We will continue to work well and hard with the people of Ontario to lay continuing shape to our five-point plan, which is in keeping with their values, their aspirations and their history.

Speaking of history, I think it's worth our while to take a little look back at what we were left with. They had a 60-cent dollar, oil at $30 a barrel, and a US economy that was firing on all eight cylinders. They left us with a $5.6-billion deficit, dramatically under-resourced public services, and an unemployment rate—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: They don't like to hear this because it's painful, but they left us with an unemployment rate of 7%. The unemployment rate today in Ontario is 6.4%. It's important for them to understand the damage that they caused this economy, and, no, we will not go back to those days and those kinds of cuts.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suspect, Premier, the folks of Ontario will be very happy to go back to the days of one million new jobs created in this province, over 700,000 people taken off the welfare rolls.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Real jobs.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Real jobs; that's right, not complete reliance on the public sector.

We're looking down the road here as well. The Premier talks about a plan, but we have around 200,000 manufacturing jobs lost in the province since July 2004. His response to that last week was, "More to come. There's more to come." Instead of saying something to the tune of, "We're going to be fighting this. We're going to be bringing in emergency measures to deal with this situation," he says that there's more to come.

The C.D. Howe Institute indicates that Ontario will remain the highest-taxed province even in 2011. Clearly you are not addressing the situation facing us, the fact that we are not being—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to remind Ontarians that we are doing a great deal within the fiscal constraints that are the lay of the land today. We're proud of our five-point plan that both cuts taxes and makes strategic investments.

But there's another issue, and that is, what we are doing with the additional wealth that we're sending to the federal government. I still have not heard my honourable colleague speak to this issue. I think sending $20 billion to the federal government for distribution in the rest of the country at a time when we are challenged here in Ontario is inappropriate. I think we should be keeping some of that money so that we could engage in the kinds of discussions he, as well as the NDP, would have us have as to what kinds of additional investments we might make and whether or not we should make additional tax cuts. We can't engage in those kinds of discussions because we're not hanging on to that $20 billion. I think Ontarians would like to know, where does the official opposition stand when it comes to that $20 billion?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I recall when the former Progressive Conservative government brought in a resolution to express concern about the disparity, and the leader sitting across from me voted against it, along with his colleagues. He plays the blame game continuously instead of dealing with the situation.

Look at the statistics in terms of the ability of this province to compete, attract investment, retain investment, bring new jobs into this province. We're dead last in economic performance and we're down at the bottom in terms of competitive ability, taxation rates.

We can go on and on with respect to the advice he's ignoring from experts like Roger Martin, yet he gets up time and time again and blames the federal government, blames external sources, and never takes any degree of responsibility for the situation we're facing in this province.

1100

Once again I ask the Premier, will he get up here on his feet today and accept some degree of responsibility and take a look at his own policies? Are you saying that nothing you've done over the past—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's obvious that Ontarians cannot rely on the Conservative Party to lift them up and to champion a stronger economy. We're going to hear nothing but negativity for weeks, months and possibly years to come.

Just to remind the members opposite about the foundation on which we are privileged to continue to build, Ontario is the number one wealth generator for Canada. We have created over one third of all new Canadian jobs since 2003. We've got nearly 40% of Canada's head offices here. We are the number one place for Canadian venture capital. We're the number one place for foreign venture capital. We're the biggest in financial services, the biggest in information communication technology, the biggest in business services, the biggest in the chemical sector, the biggest in the mining sector, the biggest in the auto sector, the biggest in manufacturing, the biggest in arts and entertainment, the biggest in private investment R&D. We have the most new business start-ups. We have the greatest investments in skills and education. We've got the highest rate of education in—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Florence Coxon was an 87-year-old senior who unfortunately spent the last years of her life restrained in a wheelchair at a Toronto nursing home. A few days ago, Mrs. Coxon was apparently strangled by the strap used to restrain her in her wheelchair. Mrs. Coxon's family says that the staff at the nursing home were overworked, always on the run and simply didn't have enough time to provide the hands-on care that people like Mrs. Coxon require.

This is not a new issue. Your government announced, with much chest-thumping, in the recent budget, five more minutes of care. Premier, the question is this: Do you think five more minutes of hands-on care is sufficient for our seniors who are residents in nursing homes and long-term-care homes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm going to have the Minister of Health speak to this in some detail momentarily, but let me just first of all, on behalf of all members, express my sympathies to the family of Mrs. Coxon and say that this is a terrible event. I know there's an in-

vestigation underway and I think it would be appropriate for all of us to await the outcome of that investigation.

What I can say is that we remain very much committed to quality of care being delivered to our parents and grandparents in Ontario's long-term-care homes. In fact, since we took office, we've increased investments there by 52%. That's more than $1 billion. This year alone, we are putting in $59 billion for 1,200 new nurses.

Again, my sympathies to the family, but I say to Ontarians that I think it's important that we allow for the investigation to unfold, and that we will continue to support long-term-care homes.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors has looked at the numbers that your government boasts about. They've crunched the numbers and they say that all that seniors like Mrs. Coxon would get is an additional five minutes of hands-on care. They say that what is required is 60 minutes of additional care each day.

According to Saturday's Toronto Star, it was clear to the Coxon family that front-line workers raced through every shift just to meet the basic needs of residents. My question is this: How many more families have to go through what the Coxon family is going through before this government listens to associations like non-profit homes, which say our seniors aren't getting the quality of care they need and that they need an additional 60 minutes of hands-on care?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: As the Premier has done, I'd like to add my words of condolence. Any time a family member is lost, it's obviously a very difficult circumstance.

There are two different investigations that are ongoing, one by the police and one by the compliance officials from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, who were on-site at the time, shortly after the occurrence.

I would say to the honourable member, I think we all agree, I'm sure, that adding staff in long-term-care homes is crucial. That's why there are more than 6,000 additional staff since we came to government; and at present, 1,200 RPN positions which are being implemented; and through our budget initiatives, almost 900 additional personal support workers will add to the ranks of those serving people in long-term-care homes in the province.

I can tell the honourable member that, while I agree the necessity of putting more care in the homes is foremost with respect to long-term care, we should all acknowledge a much higher standard of care in the long-term-care home environment than under either of these two governments.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Every year, the McGuinty government makes these announcements, but every year, the situation either stays the same or gets worse. Here's what the son Bill Coxon had to say about his mother's situation: "That was the problem. It was just the fact that they couldn't give her individual attention. I think that bothered me more, having my mother in a nursing home, where she was losing her memory, and she was just left on her own. (Staff) knew her, and they talked to her, but there were just too many other residents there," to look after.

Experts, workers, families, everyone agrees that our seniors aren't getting the quality of care they need. They all say we need three and a half hours of hands-on care per day. The McGuinty government, despite all your promises, hasn't done that. I want to ask again: Do you really think just five minutes more care is enough to look after our seniors in nursing homes and homes for the aged?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to acknowledge, of course, that family members are going to respond in an appropriate circumstance, wishing for the highest degree of care possible. In the last budget of that member's opportunity to be in a government, that increase was 0.1%. Our government's investment in enhanced care and long-term care, this year alone, is close to an additional $300 million.

The honourable member likes to talk about "five minutes," but he knows very well that the pattern is annual increases in the ratios of care, moving towards 3.25 hours of purchased care over the term of our government's mandate. We started at a number of 2.4. We're at 2.9 hours of purchased care per day. This has been a very, very substantial investment, an enhanced resource, in the form of thousands and thousands of additional people providing millions of hours of additional care in our long-term-care homes.

We agree there is more to be done. That's why our budget accounted for increased staffing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: What's needed is an hour of additional care. What you're providing is only five minutes. I think that fails by any measure.

WINDSOR BORDER CROSSING

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to ask the Premier about the city of Windsor, which produced a viable border-solution plan called GreenLink. It would have been good for the Ontario economy, for the residents of Windsor, for the environment, the air the people in Windsor breathe. Why is the McGuinty government ignoring Windsor's plan and instead going ahead with a plan that is clearly inferior?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question. I was very proud of the announcement that was made just last week. It demonstrates some of the great things we can do when we work hand in hand with the federal government. There's a strong consensus that—there's as much trade that goes back between Ontario and the US as the US does with Japan. That's how important that trade route is for us.

Together we've decided to invest, I think it's $1.6 billion, in a new access road leading to the new crossing. This is a result of a lengthy process involving six levels of government, three on each side of the border. There

was extensive consultation with the local community. We think that we have landed on the best possible alternative. We very much look forward to making this investment and creating those great jobs in Windsor, where they need them right now.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier says the McGuinty government consulted and listened. This is the headline in the Windsor Star: "City Slams DRIC Plan," which is the McGuinty plan.

The GreenLink plan, which is that advocated by people in Windsor and by Windsor city council, would have done much more for the natural environment, would have created more construction jobs, but most importantly, it's what the people of Windsor and the mayor and council of Windsor wanted to see. They advocated for this.

Why is the McGuinty government failing to meet what people asked for in the consultation, what Windsor city council asked for in the consultation? Why are you trying to give them an inferior plan which is going to be bad for the air that people breathe and bad for the people of Windsor on the whole?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're really proud of the process and its result. This is the most expensive roadbed ever built in Canada. Beyond that, as part and parcel of it, we're going to create at least 240 acres of parkland, more than 20 kilometres of recreational trails. It says that the Windsor-Essex Parkway will be the most significant single highway investment made in Ontario history with an estimated price of $1.6 billion, unprecedented in its community enhancement features for any highway anywhere in Ontario, designed using Ontario's high safety standards and practices that have made this province's roads among the safest in North America.

We're proud of the co-operation that has resulted in this magnificent plan. We're proud of the fact that we're joined by the federal government in this and we look forward to moving ahead at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I've got a quote from a Windsor Star editorial: "The DRIC Plan," which is the McGuinty plan, "A Disappointing Lack of Vision," because it doesn't meet what people in Windsor and what the city of Windsor believe is necessary. This is infrastructure that has to last for the next 30 or 40 years and, frankly, they say you're failing Windsor's needs.

Furthermore, since the federal government is committed to paying 50% of this, why not do the right thing? Why not do what the people of Windsor asked for in the consultations over and over again, what the mayor and council of Windsor asked for in the consultations over and over again? Why at this time, when Windsor really needs a shot in the arm, is the McGuinty government trying to sell the people of Windsor on an inferior plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're talking here about a six-lane freeway with 11 tunnels and service roads. It allows long-distance international traffic to travel unimpeded by traffic signals to a new inspection plaza and river crossing, while improving community linkages and providing extensive new trails, green space and other recreational opportunities. Trucks will be hidden from the view of homeowners, noise levels will be reduced and overall air quality conditions will improve for Windsor-Essex residents.

Here's what Jim Lyons, executive director of the Heavy Construction Association of Windsor, had to say: "We're hungry for work. Today is a monumental day. We're going to be at full employment. There's going to be substantial construction. We're going to be a very busy sector."

Windsorites deserve the opportunity to get back to work. Let's get on with this plan. Let's build this access road. Let's clean up the air. Let's improve the flow of traffic. Let's strengthen the Ontario economy.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Speaking of cars, my question is for the Premier. Last week, in front of the cameras, you promised a new auto plant for Ontario: "We will add a new auto assembly plant here in Ontario and we will create more jobs and all kinds of spin-off jobs." In particular, the Premier named the Italian auto giant Fiat SPA. Surely the Premier would not make such an announcement without some details secured. That would be highly irresponsible. Premier, will there be a new Fiat plant in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that the opposition party wants us to grow this economy, to land a new auto plant, to express our determination and our resolve in so doing, but what we'd like to have is their support for our auto sector strategy. They opposed our $1.15-billion Next Generation of Jobs Fund; they opposed the half-billion dollars that landed $8 billion in new investment. When I visit Italy and when I visit with the Fiat people, I hope to be able to say, "I have the support of the opposition party. I'm here to speak on their behalf as well. They fully support this public investment that we will make in terms of doing everything we can to land this new investment here in Ontario."

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'll take that as "I don't have a clue."

This was obviously another classic example of Liberal grandstanding in front of the cameras, and another broken promise from the Premier. In fact, these kinds of fake news stories and photo ops compromise our bargaining position at the table with foreign investors. Premier, will you admit that this announcement has no substance and that you made it only to save face in light of the Oshawa job losses?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The member opposite calls our $1.15 billion Next Generation of Job Funds and our auto sector strategy—he references that as corporate welfare. We see that differently, and I'll tell him that if he was to phone any of my colleagues across the country, or to phone any US governor's office, and ask them if they had any kinds of supports available, any initiatives that they're prepared to put on the table, anything at all

that they're prepared to do to compete with public dollars to land new private sector investment, they're all going to give you the same answer: It's "Yes."

We're in the game or we're not in the game. Ontario chooses to be in the game. So far, we've landed $8 billion in new investment, with at least 8,000 direct jobs. What I'd like to be able to say as we try to hustle business around the world is that we have the support of the official opposition.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. This government's consultations on poverty are to begin today, but they are hardly public. Minister Matthews is in Peterborough today to meet behind closed doors with the mayor's task force on poverty. It is by invitation only. All those who have asked to attend have been disallowed, including members of this very House. Why won't this government allow all Ontarians to participate in real public dialogue with the minister on this very important issue?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the opportunity to talk about the poverty reduction strategy. You're absolutely right: The next phase of consultations begins today. I will be in Peterborough. Mayor Ayotte of Peterborough established a poverty reduction committee there two and a half years ago. They have been working very hard, looking at constructive solutions on how we can together address what is an unacceptable level of poverty in this province. I'm very much looking forward to it; I welcome the opportunity.

That committee, for the information of the member opposite, does include several members of the community, people who are very well-connected to the issues of people living in poverty. In addition, when I'm in Peterborough this evening, I will be having dinner with kids in a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: Dozens of poverty activists in the Peterborough area have asked to attend, and they have all been denied. Members of this House have asked to attend, and they have been denied as well. We are deeply concerned that a website that the minister has set up and consultations which she's talking about in the future will not ensure participation by people affected by poverty. In fact, less than 20% of low-income Ontarians have access to the Internet.

Moreover, unless MPPs are allowed into these meetings or are given some funds to hold their own meetings, they're not going to happen. There is no money allocated in her budget for these consultations. My question: What resources and supports will be provided to members of this House so that they can ensure that low-income people can and will participate in the consultations—consultations that you so far have denied to them?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Everyone is welcome to submit their ideas through the website, ontario.ca/growingstronger. Everyone in the province has an MPP that they are free to visit. Many MPPs will be having their own consultation process, and they will be accompanied by members.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. This week, the city of Brampton is hosting its Annual Emergency Preparedness Expo with numerous partners like the Peel Regional Police, the Canadian Red Cross, St. John Ambulance and our fire department. The aim of Emergency Preparedness Week is to raise awareness of individual preparedness. Can you tell me what our government is doing from a provincial perspective to keep Ontarians safe during an emergency?

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Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for Brampton–Springdale for the question. I also want to congratulate Brampton and the member on being so proactive with regard to emergency preparedness. This week is Emergency Preparedness Week, and that's why in 2006 our government introduced the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, which gives us the legal framework in the event of a crisis.

Just last week, I had the pleasure to announce the Supply Chain Alliance. This is a partnership with 40 public and private sector partners who will, with Emergency Management Ontario, come together in the event of an emergency to ensure that there is the availability of food, water and other essentials should an event occur somewhere in Ontario.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased to hear that we have a comprehensive emergency response program that will ensure the resilience of our province should there be a crisis. It's clear that everybody has a role to play in emergency planning and preparedness. Minister, is there anything that all of our constituents can do to individually prepare for an emergency?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: That's a really important question. A few numbers might put this into context. Only 12% of Ontarians have an emergency kit and only 11% of Ontarians have an emergency plan. And so today, let me ask some rhetorical questions that I believe to be very important questions that each family should answer. Do you have enough perishable food and drinking water for the first 72 hours of an emergency? Have you packed the medication necessary? Have you put some cash away in case electronic machines are down? Do you have batteries in the event of an emergency? Have you cared for your animal, your pet? Have you made some type of arrangements if you have a special needs individual you care for? It is very, very important that we prepare for the first 72 hours in any emergency.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Lofthouse Brass, a

Burk's Falls company in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, employing 130 workers for the manufacture of brass and aluminium fittings and parts, is under bankruptcy protection. The company is currently up for sale and has a number of interested purchasers. Please note that the company has plenty of business for its Burk's Falls plant, but because of other issues, it's up for sale. There are a number of interested purchasers who are looking at the company. Some want to maintain the operations; others are just planning to liquidate the assets of the company.

I have a simple question for you. What will the Ontario government do to assist purchasers who will maintain the operations and these very important 130 jobs in Burk's Falls?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you for the question from the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka. I'm not familiar with the circumstances. This is obviously information I didn't have earlier, so I appreciate the opportunity, and perhaps we can get an opportunity to speak about this situation later on in the House. I'll do my best to work with you and see what we can do in terms of helping the company.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the minister for that response. I cannot emphasize how important these jobs are in Burk's Falls and the east Parry Sound area. This is an area that does not have a lot of industry—

Interjections.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm surprised to hear the government members heckling this very important question. This is an area that does not have a lot of industry. The company's wages and benefits total some $8.5 million annually, which is very significant to the Burk's Falls area.

Minister, would you agree to meet with representatives of Lofthouse Brass to assist in maintaining these important jobs in the Burk's Falls area?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I thank the member. We're certainly very conscious of the significance of any job losses. We're very proud of, for example, what the northern Ontario heritage fund has been able to do in terms of job creation and job retention in northern Ontario, but indeed I look forward to speaking with the member after question period. Perhaps we can set up a convenient time to have a further discussion about this.

ENBRIDGE GAS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The question is for the Minister of Energy. In February, the Ontario Energy Board responded to a Supreme Court ruling on exorbitant late fees at Enbridge by forcing gas consumers to cover Enbridge's court costs. The Premier stated that he was "very concerned" and that the OEB's decision was "counter-intuitive." Minister, why have three months passed with no word on when cabinet will overturn the OEB decision?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I'm aware of the situation, obviously. There are some legal issues here that I must be slightly careful of. My understanding is that one of the individuals who raised this issue initially is now appealing that decision to cabinet. Consequently, I think the member can appreciate that I, on behalf of cabinet, must be quite cautious about what I say.

Again, I repeat, my understanding is that this issue is now being appealed to cabinet. Cabinet, by the way our legislation works, will be reviewing that decision. Consequently, I think the member can understand, I'm not at liberty to comment on the case now. Suffice it to say, it will be before cabinet as an appeal.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Understanding everything that the minister has said, when will he bring forward a decision to protect consumers from gouging? When?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I think the public understands that this is a legal process. The individual has appealed this decision to cabinet. Cabinet has a legal responsibility to review that decision. It is legally inappropriate for me to comment on the case. It is now before cabinet. So I think in terms of the public interest and our legal responsibility, I can't comment on the case. Suffice it to say, it will be before cabinet for a decision. When that decision will be made will be based, obviously, on the necessary process that cabinet will go through.

I have no choice. I'm doing what the legislation dictates that I do, and that decision will, as I say, end up being before cabinet for a review and a decision. There is no other choice for cabinet other than to review it, to follow the necessary legal process. We will do that so we don't jeopardize this case.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, you and I both know that the quality of health care is very important to my constituents in Ottawa Centre and all Ontarians. I was very pleased to see that you visited my city last Thursday and Friday, where you visited Hôpital Montfort and the Ottawa Hospital. Would the minister tell this House the details of his announcements in Ottawa?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to thank the member from Ottawa Centre, who's been so vigorous in supporting investments in the Ottawa community. I had a great chance on Thursday and Friday to make two that are particularly noteworthy.

At the Civic site of the Ottawa Hospital, we were able to bring to life a new mobile radiation unit. This is providing enhanced capacity in the Ottawa community to support 400 patients a year with timely access to radiation that they require, at the very same time as we are building new regional cancer centre capacity at the Queensway Carleton Hospital.

Secondly, at the Montfort Hospital, we've continued with our trend of investments. In contrast to the prior government, which wanted to close the Montfort, we're nearly doubling its size and adding a second MRI to their services. This completes a tripling of access to MRI in the Ottawa community for the residents there, who waited too long under that government.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I appreciate that update. I know that my constituents appreciate the McGuinty government's recent investments in Ottawa health care in terms of cancer care and MRI. Despite what the members opposite may say, I know that this government has invested a lot of money into health care in the Ottawa region in the last four years. I would like the minister to tell this House how our government's investments are going to improve health care for my constituents in Ottawa Centre.

Hon. George Smitherman: The investments that our government is making in producing more doctors, as a result, is paying off for the residents of the Champlain local health integration network. Since 2003, we've seen an increase by more than 8%, as an example, of the number of family doctors that are practising. We've got more than 10,000 additional patients who have received care through the implementation of five family health teams in the Ottawa community, and none of these health care investments would be aided by the previous government's current plans to cut health care spending by $3 billion. But on top of that, all the people in Ottawa have seen investment in their local hospitals. At the Montfort, the investment is nearly doubling its size—750,000 square feet. At CHEO, we see the development of a new state-of-the-art east wing for intensive care, neo-natal intensive care and other programs. We've completed the redevelopment of the St. Vincent and Elizabeth Bruyère sites of the Sisters of Charity. At the Ottawa Hospital, we've opened a new critical care wing, and I mentioned before that we're undergoing a massive investment at the Queensway Carleton Hospital.

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ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: To the Minister of Agriculture: Through your Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payment program, can you explain why there was a recent report that a farmer received a livestock compensation cheque and a letter signed by you, Minister, explaining that it was for his livestock even though he hasn't had any livestock on his farm for 40 years?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: First of all, with respect to the question that has come from the honourable member, yes, our government announced assistance in December for cattle, hog and horticulture producers. The dollars were flowed through the information we have had from existing programs.

When we spoke with the stakeholders for cattle, hog and horticulture, they made it very clear that they wanted the money to their producers as quickly as possible. We committed to them that the fastest way to get those dollars to the producers was to use information we had in our system, so there was no requirement for application.

The member has brought to me a particular circumstance. I will say that it has surprised me. I would be very happy to meet with the member or to receive more information from the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Forty years is a little long oversight. Minister, that was only one example of the many problems with this program. An article in the Ontario Farmer called "Taxpayers Paying for Mistakes" recently asked, "Why did a wealthy person in western Ontario, who last owned, fed and sold a pig in 2004, go to his mailbox and there was a cheque for $14,000? Why would a young couple in the same area, struggling to remain in business with the terrible price of hogs, yet following the compensation model, expect to receive $138,000"—they got $267. The article goes on to say, "Why? Because government knows nobody cares. It is only taxpayers' money, needing to be shovelled fast for political effect, not accurately to be fair for all."

Minister, if this isn't true, can you tell me what you have done to fix this program?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Again, I would remind the honourable member that the program was a direct response, and we consulted with stakeholder leadership on the best way to deliver these dollars. I can read for the honourable member from the Ontario Cattlemen's Association president, who has indicated that he wants to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Finance. They want to recognize that the producers needed this immediate relief in this particular situation.

We have said to the producers and to all of the farmers in Ontario that when there is immediate need we are there for them. We used the existing information so that we could deliver those dollars as quickly as possible. Those cheques were in the farmers' pockets by the end of February. We have been receiving many positive comments from many farmers who were able to actually keep their farms because—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. I am very concerned for the workers of Hamilton. Last week, another 100 workers were laid off from their jobs at National Steel Car, to join with the 1,000 who have already been laid off—and the future looks even worse. What about the 400 jobs at the call centre in downtown St. Catharines, jobs that will disappear when TeleSpectrum Inc. shuts down in July? What is this government going to do to stem the tide of lost jobs in Hamilton, St. Catharines and all over this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There are real challenges facing sectors of this economy in communities including Hamilton. The government's response to the member's question was contained in our budget. We are investing in skills training—$1.5 billion. We are investing in infrastructure—an additional $1 billion on top of our $60-billion, 10-year plan on infrastructure, which, as the Premier indicated earlier in question period, not only

creates jobs in the short term but improves productivity in the long run. There are investments in high tech, investments in our ability to commercialize—including investments that went to McMaster University in the budget, an investment in infrastructure that went to the Hamilton region.

As long as one family or one community is struggling in this economy, we will continue to make the investments to stand with those families, with those economies, as we transition this economy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm glad the minister is going to train a lot of people, but I hate to inform him that we've got lots of trained people in Hamilton who are unemployed.

The National Steel Car workers are facing incredible devastation as the last major railcar manufacturer in Canada heads south. The good-paying jobs at National Steel Car are heading to the southern shoals of Barton, Alabama. St. Catharines' call centre workers are facing a bleak future. Even the Ministry of Transportation on St. Paul Street in St. Catharines will be losing revenue when its TeleSpectrum tenant no longer pays its rent.

Once again, what is this government going to do to stop this devastating exodus of good-paying jobs from Hamilton, St. Catharines and our province?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In the Hamilton area alone, we eliminated the capital tax, which will assist those very manufacturers that are challenged; we've made investments in Brock University and McMaster University; we have provided $5.7 million for new affordable housing and $11.2 million in gas tax revenues for Hamilton. Let's talk about innovation: $15 million for the initiative for automotive manufacturing innovation, a joint venture of McMaster University and the University of Waterloo. Sir, you voted against every one of those opportunities.

There is no doubt that there are challenges in our economy, but the people of Hamilton and St. Catharines know that they have a government in the McGuinty government that is standing behind them, making the proper investments in infrastructure, skills training and innovation that that member and his party voted against. We would urge him to get on board and help us transition the Niagara region through—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Attorney General. In recent years, the McGuinty government has made significant investments in our justice system, guided by an approach that is tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Could the Attorney General provide this House with an update on how we're supporting the hard work of those who keep our communities safe?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know the member for Scarborough–Rouge River has been an ardent advocate of ensuring that we have the necessary prosecutorial and investigative resources. So in his community, for example, there is a new police station, with its officers part of the 1,000 new police officers we have on the streets and in communities across the province of Ontario. Just last December, we hired another nine crowns for the Scarborough–Rouge River and related area, part of the 220 more crowns we have operating throughout the province.

He wouldn't want to forget the "tough on the causes of crime" either, because he's been a very determined advocate of investing in communities: almost $30 million, with my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services, invested—and it's working. We have the lowest crime rate in the country in the province of Ontario. Toronto has the second-lowest crime rate, and my colleague would say that that's having a real effect and is really felt in his community in a positive way.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Although it's always troubling whenever we hear or read of crime in our communities, it is reassuring to know that the overall incidence of crime continues to decline. But there is always room for more improvement. How is the Attorney General ensuring that these investments are achieving as much as we need them to?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I think the member raises a very important point, because over the years, as we invest in more police and more crowns and more judges and justices of the peace, we have to make sure the system is working as effectively as possible. We will be bringing forward a proposal, a plan to make the system work as effectively as we would want, framed by two very important facts: The time that it takes for a criminal case to work its way through the Ontario Court of Justice from beginning to end has almost doubled in 15 years, from 115 days to 205 days in 2007. Over that same period of time, the number of appearances that that case makes has gone from 4.3 to over nine, and of the nine, almost six are adjournments.

What we want to do is reduce the number of unproductive adjournments, make those resources work more effectively elsewhere in the system and make the cases proceed through faster to disposition.

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NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs: Last week, you said in this House: "I think the member knows that nobody in this House—no MPP, no member of government—is walking around with a holster and cuffs. I think the member knows that it is up to police officers to execute that duty."

Minister, I would like to quote an article from last week's Dunnville Chronicle: "Over the weekend, Six Nations Band Chief Bill Montour told Aboriginal Affairs Minister Michael Bryant that the blockade was not criminal activity and said this could become something all parties did not want it to be. He gave credit to Bryant

for talking to the Solicitor General, who reportedly told the OPP to stand down."

Minister, did you talk to the Solicitor General about having the OPP stand down?

Hon. Michael Bryant: No.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Minister.

We know that the Dunnville Chronicle stated last week that Six Nations Chief Bill Montour "gave credit to Michael Bryant for talking to the Solicitor General, who reportedly told the OPP to stand down."

There's another article I would like to report. It was written last week by Jim Windle. I know Jim. He has written more articles on Six Nations than any other journalist. This article states: "He (referring to Chief Montour) then thanked Bryant for taking his advice and asking the OPP about standing down in Tyendinaga and Caledonia." Two newspapers and two different reporters saying the same thing.

I ask you again: Did you ask the Solicitor General to interfere, or were you yourself asking the OPP about standing down in Tyendinaga and Caledonia? Given your previous statements and these two reports, are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. Michael Bryant: No again to that one as well.

Interference? The only government that has been found to interfere with police operations has been the Conservative government. It's the approach of the Conservatives. According to testimony by Charles Harnick, the approach was: "I want the ... Indians out of the park." That is an interfering approach. That is not a negotiating approach. That is an approach that was, in fact, condemned by Commissioner Linden, and it's not the approach of this government.

I know that the official opposition doesn't like to hear this. I know that the official opposition may not have liked some of the findings in this report, but we will continue to support the recommends by Sidney Linden of the Ipperwash commission.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Housing. Would the minister provide the number of new housing units built by his government since his election in 2003 that rent for $500 or less per month—that is, affordable for those on minimum wage, OW or ODSP?

Hon. Jim Watson: We're very proud of the affordable housing program that the McGuinty government signed with the previous federal Liberal government.

Let me just give you some statistics from the city of Toronto under the affordable housing program: $139.9 million for 2,937 rental and supportive housing units, $27.3 million for 1,300 housing allowance units, and $11.2 million for 1,009 home ownership units—for a total of $178.47 million.

We're also proud of the fact that there is existing housing stock in Toronto and throughout the province that is not, quite frankly, in very good shape, and that's why under our finance minister, we provided $100 million—which the NDP called "meagre"—to help fix up some of these dilapidated houses: $36 million of that went to the City of Toronto and is going to help literally thousands of people live in a more decent housing unit.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: So the answer is zero. I should have directed the question to the minister of homelessness.

Since 2003, the province has only made 486 units available that rent below $500 a month, and not one of them is new. Less than 4,000 units are available at rent under $1,000 a month, and waiting lists are 170,000 households and growing. Since being elected, this government promised to build over 20,000 units of new affordable housing. When will the Minister of Housing, or homelessness, deliver on the McGuinty promise to create over 20,000 units of affordable housing? You've only—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the member that there are specific ministries and that there are ministries that do not exist. You're making reference to one that doesn't exist.

Minister of Housing?

Hon. Jim Watson: The last group of people that I would take a lesson from when it comes to dealing with affordable housing is the NDP. Let me tell you what the NDP did in their last year in office.

Interjections.

Hon. Jim Watson: I know they're braying over there because the truth hurts: $52 million that they provided; under the McGuinty government, $189 million.

Let me tell you what the executive director of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association said a little while ago: "While no one government can solve decades of issues affecting the current state and need for more affordable housing, this government is leading the way in finding solutions to improve affordable housing in Ontario. Today's announcement will make a real difference and demonstrates that the government has been listening to the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association's concerns."

I'd take Sharad Kerur's word and his perspective over that honourable member's word and perspective any day. We're proud of our record. We've got to do more and we will.

TOURISM

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Tourism. As the summer vacation season approaches, there are many communities across the province that look to festivals and events to bolster their economy. I know that in my riding of Huron–Bruce there are many events and festivals; just to name a few, the International Plowing Match this year, the Port Elgin Pumpkinfest, the Scottish festival, the Celtic festival, the PluckinFest. These events and festivals create seasonal employment opportunities, and they also allow more exposure for the counties in a very meaningful way.

Would the minister please tell me what the McGuinty government is doing to assist the local organizations and community-building festivals so that they can continue to grow and to enhance?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First, I would like to acknowledge the member for Huron–Bruce for being such a wonderful champion for tourism in her community.

I really appreciate this opportunity to say what a significant contribution the festivals and events make to Ontario's tourism industry as well as to the economic prosperity of our province. That's why our government has invested $10 million in the Celebrate Ontario 2008 initiative. This is twice the amount that we put in in 2007. The Celebrate Ontario program saw 471 festivals and events apply for that funding. We were able to provide funding to 90 events across this province.

The Celebrate Ontario initiative will bring existing festivals and events new development and programs, activities and services. This will also bring economic benefits. These enhancements will include increased employment, regional development of tourism, trade and infrastructure.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I know that the Celebrate Ontario program has provided a significant amount of funding to the Port Elgin Pumpkinfest. The Port Elgin Pumpkinfest is a weekend-long festival with over 45 family-friendly events. I can tell you the attraction of the International Plowing Match—it's certainly a world-renowned event.

While it's great that the government has made such a significant investment to keep local festivals and events alive, these enhancements will mean nothing if there are no visitors to attend them due to the impact of high gasoline prices, confusion over the US passport requirements and the high value of the Canadian dollar. Would the minister tell us how the McGuinty government plans to combat the serious challenges that are currently facing Ontario tourism?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: That's an excellent question. The McGuinty government has committed to tourism in our platform, as well as in our fall economic statement and in the speech from the throne. We know that domestic tourism is our number-one driver in tourism: 75% of all our visitors—that's 89 million visits—are domestic tourism.

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We're also seeing our overseas markets being bolstered: increased numbers of visitors from Britain, Mexico and Germany, just to name a few. That's why we invested $30 million in that fall economic stimulus package to be able to make sure that we can address the challenges that are before us.

Yes, we have a high dollar, high gas prices and passport issues, but by working together with our partners to enhance these events and festivals and refresh Ontario's product, we're going to make sure that we have a vital and sustainable tourism industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to advise all members that copies of the provisional standing orders under which we are now operating can be found within your desks.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just wanted to rise to correct the record of my question to the Minister of Labour back on Thursday, May 1. I inadvertently referenced my own private member's bill as Bill 95 when in fact it's Bill 29.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Ajax-Pickering hospital should have full funding for mental health, including beds;

"Whereas this would affect the mental health programs and mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering hospital;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Fully fund the mental health beds and programs at Ajax-Pickering hospital."

I am pleased to sign this petition and present it to Rafaël.

MARY FIX PARK

Mr. Charles Sousa: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly about the rehabilitation of Mary Fix Park.

"Whereas the province of Ontario has acquired public and private lands for the reconstruction and upgrading of the QEW/Hurontario interchange; and

"Whereas some of the acquired lands will be in excess of the requirements for the interchange; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga has stated that these lands in excess of the interchange requirements have no developmental value; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation and highways has stated that excess lands from this project will be conveyed to the city of Mississauga for parkland; and

"Whereas the Mary Fix Park property was originally donated to the city of Mississauga exclusively for parkland to preserve natural woodland; and

"Whereas this development has caused the loss of century-old trees, natural woodland and wildlife habitat from Mary Fix Park, and has substantially increased noise and traffic to local residences; and

"Whereas the lands on the south and west side of Pinetree Way are no longer the subject of further construction;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, remediate the lands surrounding the south and west areas of Pinetree Way between Hurontario Street and Glenburnie Road by planting trees and constructing berms within this year, and convey all excess lands from the QEW/Hurontario interchange to the city of Mississauga upon completion of the project."

I will now give it to Sheilagh, the page.

LORD'S PRAYER

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

It's signed by many, many people from the Brock area of my riding, and I'll hand it to page Isabelle.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition signed by many people from Niagara Falls, including Cindy Massey.

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents as required in Bill 33 put forward by MPP Kim Craitor.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child.

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this bill.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our spiritual and parliamentary tradition since it was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my name in full support.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is in conjunction with Bill 56, which the member for Eglinton–Lawrence introduced earlier. It's about unlawful firearms in vehicles. It reads as follows:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can

reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to affix my signature to this petition.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I have affixed my signature to this petition and given it to page Dario.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I gladly sign this petition.

1200

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Once again we have a number of these petitions, and it's my pleasure to read them into the record.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current McGuinty government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of parliamentary tradition since it was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Speaker has received thousands of phone calls on this issue; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my name in full support.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Central East local health integration network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, its largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact on the quality care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I will affix my signature to that and pass it to Cali.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Kim Craitor: I want to thank Bernice Mowat, who came into my office and asked me to read a number of these petitions on behalf of people in my riding.

"Whereas the government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition and I'm pleased to sign my signature to it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: This is a petition with respect to Bill 56.

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: An additional petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East local health integration network ... board of directors approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas, with the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

I will affix my signature to this and pass it to Matthew.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House is recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1206 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Julia Munro: Children's mental health in Ontario is in crisis and this government is refusing to take action. Last Friday, along with my colleague the member for Newmarket–Aurora, I met with a wide range of agencies and individual professionals who deal with children's mental health in York region. We heard about the crisis that exists in children's mental health in our area and across Ontario—wait times for child psychiatric services of more than a year that are devastating to children and families. In York region alone, 39,000 are on a waiting list and only 5,000 children are being treated. Children with mild to moderate problems linger on these waiting lists until they move into crisis situations.

The government doesn't seem to understand that the ounce of prevention is worth more than the investment later. Children have to get worse before they can get help. This crisis is a McGuinty-government-created crisis. It exists because you refuse to provide enough money for children to get the help they need.

Two years ago, the ministry issued a framework document for child and youth mental health. What we want to

know is: When will you give children with mental health problems the funding that they need?

TAXI DRIVERS

Mr. Paul Miller: If members of this House have been reading the news lately, it will be no surprise why taxi drivers are raising issues about their safety, not only in Hamilton, but as far away as Melbourne, Australia. Over the past couple of months, there have been a string of attacks against Hamilton taxi drivers, including vicious beatings and weapon-related robberies. Most recently, Hamilton taxi driver and my constituent Pervez Minhes was attacked twice in two nights, once at knifepoint.

Hamilton police recognize the dangers that taxi drivers face. Last week, they held a safety forum for drivers, outlining strategies on how to avoid robberies and injuries. Hamilton city council recognizes the dangers that taxi drivers face. It has revived its taxi liaison committee and is moving forward with a dedicated planning and economic development committee forum in June.

Unfortunately, safety training sessions and forums are not enough. Now is the time for this Legislature to take charge and recognize the dangers that taxi drivers face daily. The Cab Drivers Welfare Association of Hamilton is calling on the province to legislate mandatory protective shields. We must act now and begin the process to consult with the various taxi driver associations in this province.

EVERGREEN HOSPICE MARKHAM-STOUFFVILLE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to commend our government as it continues to move forward in the promotion and advancement of cultural health and social services in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. An Ontario Trillium Foundation grant is being awarded to Evergreen Hospice Markham-Stouffville in the amount of $99,000.

Since 1989, this not-for-profit organization has provided supportive care for people experiencing the horrendous impact of life-threatening illness or death, and it continues to expand upon its services and reach out to our growing area. Over the next two years, Evergreen Hospice Markham-Stouffville will utilize this funding to continue creating awareness of its services within our community's Chinese and South Asian populations. It will use this money to help with staffing and promotion costs without sacrificing its usual quality of care.

Its services include in-home visiting and respite care for clients and their families; social visiting to seniors in nursing homes; a day program with crafts, entertainment, alternative therapies, outings and social events; and bereavement services for children, youth and adults, including support groups and individual counselling. Eight part-time staff, 175 volunteers and a 12-member board of directors make all these initiatives possible.

Congratulations to Evergreen Hospice Markham-Stouffville, and to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for recognizing its enormous contribution to our community.

DONALD BEANLANDS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I rise today to pay tribute to a wonderful man, Dr. Don Beanlands, co-founder of the Ottawa Heart Institute, who is retiring at the age of 75.

Last Thursday, May 1, was proclaimed Dr. Donald S. Beanlands Day in Ottawa. On Thursday night, I attended a dinner in his honour with 900 other people. It takes a very special person to get 900 people out to a retirement dinner. I want to say that Dr. Beanlands certainly was a very special person to Ottawa.

Dr. Beanlands joined the Ottawa Heart Institute as chief of cardiology when it opened in 1979 and has spent the last 32 years saving thousands of lives. Surprisingly, he is not well known among the general public, but he is loved by his patients and all the hospital staff, the nurses and volunteers. Rarely have I met a more caring individual.

Not only do Dr. Beanlands' roughly 25,000 patients owe him a debt of gratitude almost anyone who has received cardiovascular treatment in Canada should be thankful for his efforts. Dr. Beanlands helped set the original cardiology exams in this country and helped to train cardiologists at the University of Ottawa.

In his retirement, he is reportedly considering writing a book on cardiology, something which will ensure that his contributions will continue for many years to come. And all members of the House will want to thank him and wish him well on his favourite pastime, fly-fishing. He was noted as the best fly-fisher in all of the heart institute.

MUSIC MONDAY

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Earlier today, the sound of song filled the halls at Queen's Park. Since 2005, students, teachers, parents, musicians and music lovers have celebrated Music Monday on the first Monday of May. Created and championed by the Coalition for Music Education in Canada, Music Monday is a celebration of the power of music in Ontario and across Canada, giving schools and communities an opportunity to demonstrate how this power is rooted in school music programs.

On Music Monday, we celebrate the importance of music in our schools and in our lives across Ontario. Schools from coast to coast are united when, at the same point in time, all students perform the same piece of music. Music Monday is a tangible demonstration of how music programs unite us, shape young lives and contribute to the cultural vitality of Canada.

I'm so proud to come from a community that understands the importance of arts and culture and celebrates it with festivals, programming and services aimed at enriching our community. In Etobicoke–Lakeshore, students at Lanor Junior Middle School will be celebrating

Music Week by performing with Hollycrest school in Etobicoke Centre today. And earlier today, I visited the stairs of the Legislature to hear the performance by the Toronto District School Board.

I hope that all members in this House will join me in congratulating the dedicated parents, teachers and students who all came to join us here at Queen's Park today under the leadership of the Coalition for Music Education in Canada and their executive director, Ingrid Whyte.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. John Yakabuski: This week, we mark Emergency Preparedness Week, a week-long national event that takes place during the first week of May to remind us that we can reduce the risks and lessen the consequences of a disaster by being better prepared.

I regret to say that the McGuinty government has certainly not prepared Ontario for its economic crisis. We've seen in recent months the disastrous impact the McGuinty government's policies have had on businesses throughout the province.

Just last week, I spoke about Campbell Soup Co. in Listowel, where, after 48 years in business, they've been forced to close their doors and lay off 500 loyal staff. My colleague Tim Hudak recently spoke about the closure of the CanGro plant in Niagara, where 100 workers and 150 tender fruit growers have been handed their pink slips.

We've asked the Premier what his government is doing to prepare for this growing economic crisis. They tell Ontarians to prepare themselves by putting together kits for an emergency, and yet they do absolutely nothing to reduce the damage inflicted on Ontario by their own policies. People are suffering because this government has neglected to take its own advice. They've neglected to plan, they've neglected to prepare and they refuse to take responsibility.

The Liberal government offers lots of advice to deal with an unforeseen disaster, but what advice do they offer Ontarians for one that was foreseen, that is clear, that is hurting and that is here? "Steel yourselves; this too shall pass."

The Premier is fiddling while Rome is burning. Shame on him.

CHARLES CACCIA

Mr. Mike Colle: "We have lost an extraordinary Canadian who devoted himself to public service, looked far ahead, said what he thought, and then kept his good cheer during the ensuing furor," wrote Dr. John Polanyi, Nobel Prize laureate, of Charles Caccia MP, who passed away in Ottawa over the weekend. Charles Caccia served a consecutive 36 years in Ottawa as MP for Davenport.

1310

Born in Milan, Mr. Caccia arrived in Canada in 1955 and struggled like many immigrants, yet he was the co-founder of COSTI, an institute that is still serving immigrants today. In 1965, Mr. Caccia was elected as a city of Toronto alderman, where he soon became a champion for the environment and public transit. In 1968, he was elected MP for Davenport under the leadership of his life-long friend and ally, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

As MP, he began to take up the cause of the environment a long time before anyone else even talked about it. As John Coo, vice-president of Green Cross Canada, said, Mr. Caccia had "a breadth and depth of knowledge and a history of involvement in international environment issues spanning 40 years."

It was my privilege and honour to have known and worked with Mr. Charles Caccia for 40 years. He was a pioneer, he was a leader, decades ahead of his time in championing sustainable development and ensuring that the environment was an imperative in Canada. He ensured we all were held to account. Until his last days, Mr. Caccia practised what he preached. He will be sadly missed by all of us who were inspired by this truly outstanding Canadian: Charles Caccia.

MEMBER'S FAMILY

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: My statement today is about my family. They are visiting, for their first time, the Ontario Legislature. It's my distinct honour to introduce them: my brother, Mr. Surrinder Grewal, from Surrey, British Columbia; my nephew, Harpreet Grewal, from San Diego, California; his wife, Roopinder Grewal, from San Diego, California; and our granddaughter, Meher Grewal, from San Diego, California.

It's my distinct honour. My brother has been a father figure in my life. They were visiting here to attend a wedding. I thought I should bring them here, so that they know my workplace, how it works and what it looks like.

TOURISM

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Later today, the Wine Council of Ontario, along with the Greater Toronto Hotel Association and the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association, will be hosting a reception to draw attention to some of the many fine accommodations and tourist attractions to be found here in Ontario. Indeed, when it comes to things to do and places to see, there is no place like this, our beautiful province of Ontario.

Only in Ontario can you experience our fabled ice wines and other delights for the palate, to be found along the Ontario wine route. Your breath can be taken away by the awesome natural beauty to be found in the Algonquin provincial parks. The rich history of our province unfolds for those who pass through the gates of Fort Henry or stroll the avenues of Upper Canada Village. Nowhere can you hear your heart sing like you can right here in Toronto and the Golden Horseshoe: from the theatre to world-class museums, to great festivals ranging from Caribana to the Toronto International Film Festival.

We have delights for all tastes and ages. I encourage all members to come and mingle with the representatives from our tourism and accommodation industries at the reception today and to get out this summer, partake of our many provincial attractions, and discover Ontario first-hand.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Hon. Michael Bryant: I believe we have unanimous consent for a member of each party to speak for up to five minutes regarding Yom Hashoah.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Michael Bryant: As well, I'm not sure if the member is going to do it during his remarks, but I've also notified all parties that the member will be seeking unanimous consent to recite part of the prayer in Hebrew. I'll let him deal with that. Or we could deal with this now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Some of you know, because many of your members were there, that we just had a ceremony where we honoured nine Holocaust survivors. That was over at the Macdonald Block, and it's finished—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We can't hear the member because his mike is covered by the books.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Oh, sorry. The ceremony just finished, and these people and the members who participated are making their way back to the Legislature as we speak. They should be here in two or three minutes, but in the meantime, I think it would be appropriate, when certainly I'm going to refer to them, that they be here when we do it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I appreciate the point of order, and I'll take that under advisement. We'll go back to routine proceedings. Are there any statements by ministries? Deferred votes?

Is the House in agreement that we adjourn for five minutes to allow our guests to arrive? Okay. We'll recess for five minutes.

The House recessed from 1316 to 1323.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: In a ceremony at Queen's Park earlier today, we recognized and honoured nine Holocaust survivors whose stories of anguish, suffering and survival of both body and spirit are a testimony to the human will to live. These Holocaust survivors, who are to be in the House today, came to Ontario, rebuilt their lives and were honoured for their wonderful contributions as citizens of Ontario. Those honoured were Tamara Erlich, Al Gelfant, Sol Kafka, Jerry Kapelus, Shifra Knobel, Mike Mayer, Johanan Steinberg, Jack Weinbaum and Cantor Severin Weingort.

Today, we recognize Yom Hashoah V'Hagvurah, Holocaust Memorial Day, a day designated for Holocaust remembrance in communities around the world. This is the 15th year that the Ontario Legislature has observed Holocaust Memorial Day, and I'm proud to say that Ontario was the first jurisdiction in the world outside of the state of Israel to officially recognize it.

I have visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial and museum in Jerusalem, several times. The memorial is dedicated to preserving the memory and story of each of the six million people who died in the Holocaust. As a Jew, these memories strike the heart and the soul. Every Jew is touched by the Holocaust. We lost loved ones, family members or friends; all members in the community lost someone.

The Holocaust echoes through generations. The loss is extraordinary.

At Yad Vashem, that loss is made real. It's concrete. You can touch it. In the Valley of the Communities, you stand before wall after wall, carved out of solid rock, listing the names of more than 5,000 communities that lived, breathed, had life, in which men and women loved, married, raised children, worked, laughed and worshipped. Today, in most cases, nothing remains of these Jewish communities except for their names, forever frozen in the bedrock of Yad Vashem. It was here that I found the name of the town where my father was born, Czestochowa, and the town where my mother was born, Sosnowiec.

The Holocaust reaches out of the past and touches the shoulder of every Jew, but the Children's Memorial is especially sad. It commemorates the 1.5 million Jewish children who perished in Hitler's Final Solution. The memorial is carved out of an underground cavern, and memorial candles, the customary Jewish tradition to remember the dead, are reflected infinitely in a dark and sombre place. They reminded me of a million stars. And as you stand there, you can hear the names of the murdered children, their ages and countries of origin, read in the background.

Holocaust Memorial Day commemorates all those who died in the Holocaust, not just Jews. We also remember those whom the Nazis targeted for their race, their religion, their politics, their disabilities, or their sexual orientation. It's important to set aside time to remember all these victims whose lives were taken by the Nazis. In remembering, we bear witness to what these men, women and children endured.

Tragically, other genocides have followed since World War II, in Cambodia, Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia. It is evident that we must continue our struggle to keep alive the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the United Nations 60 years ago in the shadow of the Holocaust. The declaration recognized the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as a foundation of freedom, justice and peace throughout the world. It called on the world to protect human rights by the rule of law.

We are indeed fortunate to live in Canada and in Ontario, but we must never take our good fortune for granted. We must guard our democratic institutions and democratic freedoms. We must appreciate, nurture and

protect them, and we must constantly remind ourselves how easy it is to lose them.

While I was in the Valley of the Communities at Yad Vashem, I laid a wreath and I recited a brief traditional Hebrew mourner's prayer, the Kaddish. On Yom Hashoah, Jewish communities around the world recite that prayer. Last Wednesday evening, some of our members were at Earl Bales Park, and there were hundreds of people who recited the Kaddish. On behalf of the victims, the survivors and their families I would like to recite that Hebrew prayer, which is something for which all people may pray.

Remarks in Hebrew.

One line in this prayer translates as, "He who creates peace in His celestial height, may He create peace for us."

We must always remember so that the world will never forget.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Halton.

I represent Thornhill, the constituency with the largest Jewish population in any of the 107 ridings of Ontario. Virtually no Jewish family in Thornhill has not recorded in its own history the effects of what Hitler called the Final Solution and what we call the Holocaust. In fact, that could be said of any Jewish family living in Ontario today.

Indeed, I myself would not be standing here in this chamber today but for that event. My father was a German-Jewish refugee who arrived in Canada after fleeing Nazi Germany and coming here by way of England, because in Canada he was free to be a Jew. In Canada, we are all free to practise our religions and to live our lives in any way we choose.

1330

Like so many of his number, my father could never speak of the life he left behind. He is gone now, as are many of that generation, but we still have some, thankfully, those like today's honorees, who are willing to share their horrific experiences so that today's generation remembers, through them, what was allowed to happen in the 1930s and 1940s. We mark Holocaust remembrance for them and for those who cannot speak, and when all of the survivors' voices are silenced, we will remember them.

My father's parents never left Germany, the country of their birth, the country to which they contributed their efforts, the country to which they swore allegiance. They remained behind, in hope, and they became but two of the six million lost in Nazi concentration camps, the grandparents I never met.

Today, in Ontario and around the world, we remember them all, and we are mindful that we are so blessed to live in a land such as this, for without the diversity and the openness we share as Canadians, many of us would not be here to remember those who came before: the six million souls who perished in the most heinous crime ever committed against humanity. And I say: Never again.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The Holocaust was the most horrific crime of the 20th century—perhaps ever—yet out of this tragedy many positive lessons can be learned.

We learn how instigators and perpetrators planned and executed the brutal murders of over six million people. It reveals the evil capacity of humankind. We must be ever watchful so that this may never be allowed to happen again.

From the Holocaust, we learn how collaborators and bystanders share the responsibility of the Holocaust: For instance, in 1939, when the ship St. Louis was bound for Canada with 900 Jewish refugees aboard, they were turned away. They were forced back to Germany and an inevitable fate. We could have done something; instead, Canada did nothing. We were complicit then, but as long as we remember and honour the victims of the Holocaust, we will not be complicit, silent or idle ever again.

The Holocaust also teaches us how to treat our fellow men and women. We hear often that we must be tolerant of others, but tolerance is not nearly enough. We need to move beyond tolerance and towards real and meaningful respect. To tolerate someone suggests that we will put up with them despite the fact that they are wrong or inferior. To respect someone means that we honour a different point of view, even if it is not our own. To respect someone who is different is an exercise in humility, because in doing so, we acknowledge our own capacity to err. The Holocaust teaches us that tolerance can slip into hate, but respect is the foundation for peace and progress.

Let us endeavour to become a more respectful society together. Let us take the lessons of the Holocaust to heart for ourselves, for our future and for the honour of those six million who needlessly perished at the hands of ignorance.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Today, I rise to remember and honour those who faced unimaginable horror and persecution less than a few decades ago in the Holocaust. Between 1933 and 1945, over six million Jewish men, women and children were systemically murdered. Entire communities, villages—indeed, entire generations—were exterminated in the most brutal fashion, and the state-sponsored and organized genocide also killed millions of others because of their race, their religion, their sexual orientation or the fact that they may have had a physical or mental handicap. The toll this ruthless campaign took on human dignity, human rights and society as a whole is immeasurable.

The atrocities of the Holocaust are often impossible for us to understand, yet even harder to forget, and that is why we must never forget what happened. We must not allow ourselves to forget that the early warning signs of the persecution of Jews existed in 1935, in 1936, in 1937. Much of the world did nothing to oppose that persecution. Tens of thousands of Jewish families tried to flee Nazi Germany and many countries closed their borders, Canada for the most part included.

We must not forget that humanity is capable of repeating this kind of violence and repression because, very often, those who can make a difference stay silent or feel helpless. History must serve as a reminder that we must

always be on guard so this can't happen again. As has already been said, from time to time, whether in Rwanda, Cambodia or Armenia, we have seen this kind of crime repeated. We must always be on the side of justice, ready to defend our diverse communities when they come under attack. We must always be ready to stand up and speak out today and every day against anti-Semitism, against Islamophobia, against hate and racism, against discrimination and prejudice in all its insidious forms. We must act decisively when the ugly realities of hate crimes and neo-Nazism resurface in present-day Ontario.

Today we stand with Jewish Canadians and all victims of genocide against hate-mongers and commit to taking decisive action to put a stop to racist actions, just as we finally did so many years ago.

Many of the Holocaust survivors who were freed from concentration camps came to Canada, settled here in Ontario, and have become important members of society who have made incredible contributions to our community. Today, we say we will never forget the horrors that human beings are capable of. More so, we will also never, ever forget the resilience, the hope, the strength, the courage and the sheer capacity of human beings together to triumph over some of the greatest cruelty our world has ever seen.

In Ontario, we have an immense capacity and responsibility to work together, to work diligently and with sincerity to create a province and a country where all cultures, all religions, and the rights of all people are respected and honoured. Fulfilling this vision is a duty that requires the involvement of us all.

On this day, we commit ourselves to creating a better and safer world so that we never see the horrors repeated again.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to, on behalf of all members, take this opportunity to welcome our guests here in the east members' gallery and in the Speaker's gallery.

I'd ask all members and all of our guests who are here today to please rise as we observe a moment of silence in recognition of the Holocaust.

The House observed a moment's silence.

1340

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR L'OFFICE DES TÉLÉCOMMUNICATIONS ÉDUCATIVES DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Bryant, on behalf of Ms. Wynne, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to enact the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008 and make complementary amendments to the Ontario Educational Communications Authority Act / Projet de loi 55, Loi édictant la Loi de 2008 sur l'Office des télécommunications éducatives de langue française de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires à la Loi sur l'Office de la télécommunication éducative de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Bryant has moved second reading of Bill 55. Mr. Bryant.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm going to be sharing my time with the parliamentary assistant, the member for London–Fanshawe, and I'm also going to be sharing my time with the minister responsible. I will do that right now, although I did want to have the opportunity to say during debate that we are particularly proud in the great riding of St. Paul's to find TVO and TFO in the great riding of St. Paul's. I now will happily ask the minister responsible to join the debate.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I will be sharing my time with the member from London–Fanshawe today.

This is an exciting time in French-language education. The Aménagement linguistique policy launched by the Ministry of Education four years ago has started to bear fruit, and the success of French-language students has never been higher.

Monsieur le Président, alors que nous célébrons le 10e anniversaire de la gestion scolaire francophone, le moment est venu de nous pencher à la fois sur le passé et l'avenir.

La communauté francophone de l'Ontario est un exemple vraiment parfait d'une communauté forte, prospère et engagée qui est fière de son histoire et qui est tournée vers l'avenir. Nous avons fait d'énormes progrès depuis l'adoption de la Loi sur les services en français en 1986 et, en fait, depuis le début de la grande aventure francophone en Ontario. Les pages de l'histoire franco-ontarienne, qui a débuté il y a 400 ans, continuent d'être écrites chaque jour.

The future has never been brighter for Ontario's French-language students, particularly today as we give second reading to proposed legislation that would make TFO an independent entity.

TFO is more than an educational resource; it is one of the focal points of Franco-Ontarian culture. TFO disseminates Franco-Ontarian culture to every corner of the province and beyond. TFO is not only a broadcaster but also a developer of content. This is important because TFO's programming is one of the few places where Franco-Ontarians can see their culture reflected. In this way, TFO acts as a unifying force, a virtual town square where Franco-Ontarians come together.

L'identité culturelle n'est pas un concept statique. Elle naît tôt dans la vie et elle est renforcée ou affaiblie au fil des ans. L'identité culturelle est renforcée lorsque les membres d'un groupe culturel ont des interactions positives à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de leur communauté. Elle est renforcée lorsque les messages vé-

hiculés sur l'identité et la richesse de la culture sont positifs, et lorsque la culture est décrite dans les écoles et les médias de masse sous un jour positif.

Ceci est particulièrement important pour les communautés minoritaires, car pour elles, la validation culturelle est vitale.

Lorsque les émissions de TFO brossent un tableau réaliste de la culture franco-ontarienne et lorsque les Franco-Ontariennes et Franco-Ontariens se reconnaissent en elle, il en découle un renforcement de leur identité et du dynamisme culturel de leur communauté. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous avons besoin que TFO soit un organisme fort et autonome.

Afin d'offrir aux franco-ontariennes et franco-ontariens un soutien éducatif et de valider leur identité, TFO contribue à faire de l'Ontario une province plus forte en renforçant la communauté d'expression française. Plus qu'un moyen d'information, TFO a donné à la francophonie ontarienne une voix et une identité, une voix grâce à laquelle nous communiquons avec les autres communautés francophones de l'Ontario, une voix par laquelle nous exprimons notre identité spécifique et nous nous faisons connaître aux francophones du monde entier.

Cette identité est la synthèse de ce que la francophonie ontarienne a de mieux à offrir, une identité propre dont la diversité régionale et culturelle est reflétée dans les émissions et les reportages audacieux de TFO. Plus que notre langue, c'est notre culture franco-ontarienne que TFO véhicule et valorise.

C'est aussi notre jeunesse, avec une programmation et des sites Web qui lui sont dédiés. Pour la communauté franco-ontarienne et encore plus pour ses jeunes, TFO est une fenêtre ouverte sur le monde, un espace de passage et un lieu de reconnaissance. Je voudrais mentionner une émission de TFO, FranCoeur, qui est mise en production par les productions Robert Charbonneau et qui raconte la vie des cultivateurs franco-ontariens de l'est de l'Ontario. C'est une émission qui a été très regardée non seulement par les Franco-Ontariens et par les Ontariens, mais qui a été diffusée au Québec et au Nouveau–Brunswick. C'est par elle que la langue et la culture prennent toute leur pertinence.

C'est d'autant plus crucial que les francophones sont dans notre province en situation minoritaire et que « vivre en français » demande souvent des efforts et du courage. Pour assurer le renouvellement et l'épanouissement de nos communautés, il est essentiel de trouver des façons de motiver, d'inspirer et de valoriser nos jeunes francophones afin qu'eux aussi soient fiers de s'identifier comme Franco-Ontariens. Ceci est important, car la communauté francophone est une des communautés dynamiques qui font de l'Ontario une province remarquable. La capacité bilingue de la province et ses ressources en langue française contribuent à assurer la vitalité culturelle et économique de la province de maintes façons.

La communauté francophone a contribué au développement de tous les secteurs de l'économie. Les francophones sont propriétaires d'environ 12 000 entreprises ou sociétés. Les auteurs et dramaturges franco-ontariens sont reconnus dans tout le Canada. Et la communauté francophone fait sentir sa présence dans la vie culturelle de l'Ontario grâce, entre autres, à des festivals, galeries d'art, centres culturels, troupes de théâtre et médias.

Ontario wouldn't be the same without a vibrant French-language education sector. This is why we've invested significantly in French-language schools, investments that include funding for 100 new French-language secondary school teachers this school year alone and $220 million in new funding to build and acquire a new French-language school. We invested $20 million in York University's Glendon College, where a new centre of excellence for francophone and bilingual post-secondary education will be created, and we expanded access to post-secondary education for French-language students in northeastern Ontario by supporting the construction of a new Collège Boréal campus in Timmins.

In addition, we have broken down artificial barriers between the French-language schools, colleges, universities and training institutions. In fact, earlier this month, a meeting took place between the director of French-language boards, the presidents of French-language colleges, the heads of bilingual universities, the CEO of TFO, and senior officials from both ministries. This is the first time leaders representing all these different areas of French-language education have come together to discuss new ways of doing things.

We will continue to invest in resources to support French-language boards, students and teachers. We will work with our partners to ensure that we are supporting the curriculum and new initiatives with the right resources. We know this is a particular challenge for French-Language education.

1350

Notre gouvernement continuera d'améliorer l'accès aux écoles de langue française et de mettre l'accent sur les régions insuffisamment desservis. Nous accentuerons nos efforts pour augmenter le nombre de diplômés bilingues des écoles secondaires de langue anglaise.

Nous renforcerons les programmes de français langue seconde et nous continuerons à faire appel à l'engagement des communautés et des parents pour mieux faire connaître l'éducation en français.

À ce propos, nous avons réservé 1 $ million pour mieux sensibiliser le public à l'existence de l'éducation en français en Ontario. Et nous ferons tout en notre pouvoir pour rendre les écoles françaises aussi attrayantes et accessibles que possible pour les personnes ayant le droit de faire éduquer leurs enfants en français.

Nous avons travaillé d'arrache-pied pour transformer nos écoles en lieu de rassemblement pour la communauté. Ceci est particulièrement cruciale pour les écoles françaises car la communauté francophone est de plus en plus diverse.

Les écoles françaises ont un rôle important à jouer au plan de l'accueil, du soutien de l'unification des franco-ontariennes et ontariens dans toute leur diversité.

Nous continuerons sur notre lancée pour aider les écoles secondaires françaises à offrir le même éventail de cours spéciaux que les écoles secondaires anglaises. Nous continuerons aussi à renforcer les liens avec les collèges français, les fournisseurs de services à la petite enfance et les universités bilingues, et avec les centres d'alphabétisation des adultes en langue française et les fournisseurs de services d'Emploi Ontario.

La population franco-ontarienne est fière de la programmation offerte par TFO. Comme je l'ai dit, pour la communauté franco-ontarienne, TFO est plus qu'un moyen de transmission de l'information; le réseau médiatique donne aussi une voix et une identité à la communauté francophone de l'Ontario, une voix qui exprime notre identité spécifique aux yeux des résidents et résidentes de l'Ontario et de la population francophone du monde entier notre propre identité dans toute sa diversité régionale et culturelle, notre propre identité reflétée dans des programmes culturels créatifs, des émissions d'affaires publiques et cela va sans dire, des programmes éducatifs.

TFO doit continuer à concevoir des programmes et un contenu multimédia exceptionnels en français qui reflètent non seulement l'identité francophone, mais aussi l'identité franco-ontarienne.

Nous devons continuer à favoriser l'accès à la langue et à la culture françaises aux quatre coins de l'Ontario, dans des collectivités qui sont majoritairement francophone et dans des collectivités où les Franco-Ontariennes et Franco-Ontariens sont isolés du reste de la francophonie ontarienne.

Et nous devons continuer à offrir des ressources qui tiennent compte des besoins particuliers des élèves francophones. Les jeunes qui fréquentent aujourd'hui nos écoles sont les médecins et les infirmières et infirmiers auxquels nous confierons demain notre santé. Ils contribueront à la vie culturelle par la littérature et les arts. Nous compterons sur eux pour garder notre province verte et belle, et notre économie forte et prospère.

Pour nous, l'éducation en français doit permettre d'assurer l'épanouissement de la langue et de la culture française en Ontario. Elle doit éduquer et entourer les élèves franco-ontariens, qui sont la main-d'œuvre de demain, pour en faire des adultes assoiffés de connaissance, animés d'un esprit critique.

Ce projet de loi, s'il est adopté, fera de TFO un organisme autonome, un organisme qui sera mieux en mesure d'aider les élèves. Samedi dernier je participais au 25e anniversaire de la fondation de l'école secondaire publique De La Salle à Ottawa. Cette école forme—c'est une concentration arts. Elle forme des artistes que nous admirons à tous les jours, des artistes qui performent non seulement au Canada mais à travers le pays, des artistes qui sont sur Broadway, des artistes qui font parti du Cirque du Soleil. Alors, je voudrais féliciter M. Jean-Claude Bergeron, qui a été le premier directeur de cette concentration arts à l'école De La Salle, et je veux féliciter tous les professeurs qui, de près ou de loin, ont contribué à la formation de ces élèves. La plupart de ces élèves ne sont pas seulement en concentration arts, mais ils font aussi partie du groupe en douance. Alors, c'est un joyau dans l'éducation francophone en Ontario.

En fin de compte, ce sont la culture et l'économie de l'Ontario, et la province dans son ensemble, qui seront les grands gagnants. Je vous remercie.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today for the second reading of legislation that would support Ontario's French-language students, teachers and parents.

L'éducation et la culture françaises sont un des volets majeurs de la vision globale de notre gouvernement. Elles sont une des caractéristiques qui définissent l'Ontario et en font un modèle pour le monde entier.

Alors que nous célébrons le 10e anniversaire de la création des conseils scolaires francophones, il est important que nous continuions à soutenir l'éducation en français. Nous sommes fiers des réalisations des élèves d'expression française. Ils ont beaucoup travaillé pour assurer leur réussite scolaire. Leurs parents se sont attachés à les soutenir. Et il en a été de même des éducatrices et éducateurs et du personnel de soutien dans les écoles françaises.

En tant que gouvernement, nous avons fait un effort concerté pour veiller à ce que les élèves de langue française disposent des ressources voulues en salle de classe et chez eux. Nous devons encore—cela va sans dire—relever des défis, tant aujourd'hui que demain. Cependant, si les progrès accomplis au cours des 10 dernières années en sont une indication, j'estime que les élèves francophones de l'Ontario ont un avenir encore plus radieux devant eux. Et je pense que tant que nous leur permettons d'avoir accès à des opportunités et à des ressources adaptées à leurs besoins, ils les saisiront et relèveront les défis.

French-language students need to be immersed in their culture outside of the classroom as well as inside. That's what makes TFO such a great asset to our French-language students and teachers, because it enriches the classroom experience and their lives. Students, parents and teachers all benefit from the educational resources that TFO makes available. TFO offers educational TV programming that is available to teachers for use in the classroom, and TFO broadcasts programming that makes it possible for francophone Ontarians to continue to learn and be entertained in their own language when they're at home.

TFO allows francophone Ontarians to see themselves and their culture reflected in the programs that TFO develops right here in Ontario. But TFO's support of French-language education does not stop there. I am amazed at the comprehensive offering of websites TFO produces to support students outside the classroom. When French-language students need tips on how to complete a difficult homework assignment, they go to SOS Devoirs to get homework help. When students want to have fun while building their vocabulary, they go to the Alphablitz website. They play games at the Café des MATHadores to practise their math skills. Chimie.com shows how chemistry is at work behind the scenes in our

everyday lives. I won't describe all of these websites as there are close to 100 of them produced by TFO, but I do want to say that I am impressed with how the TFO websites turned learning into fun and the fact that there is a website addressing just about every topic in the curriculum for every age group. Also, while I'm impressed by the quantity of websites available, it is the quality of TFO's learning resources that impressed me most.

1400

The use of information technology to bolster learning is well recognized, but experts warn that too often technology is seen as a panacea, a quick fix to magically solve all our problems. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Online learning resources are only as sound as the pedagogy that underpins them. Research shows that regardless of the medium used to convey instruction, it must be based on a sound approach that takes into account how students think, how they process information and how they learn. Otherwise, it does not work, but TFO does work, and this is because of the rigour behind the approaches adopted by the people who created the TFO learning websites.

TFO employs experts and educators to help design its websites and its shows. That's why TFO's learning websites are not only popular with teachers, students and their parents here in Ontario; they are also visited frequently by French-language students from across the globe. TFO must be recognized for what it is: a success story.

Je peux affirmer que TFO soutient de façon efficace la politique d'aménagement linguistique du ministère de l'Éducation, et ce de maintes façons. C'est un des fondements de l'éducation en français dans l'Ontario moderne.

Grâce à TFO, le personnel enseignant dispose d'un choix d'environ 3 600 émissions de télévision, favorisant l'apprentissage en salle de classe. La plupart des enseignantes et enseignants se prévalent pleinement de ces ressources. Je crois comprendre que de nombreux enseignants et enseignantes des écoles francophones font très souvent appel aux ressources de TFO en salle de classe.

It's clear to me that TFO is an essential component of French-language education. But it's not just me who feels this way; 83% of Ontario francophones say that it is essential for all francophones in Ontario to have access to TFO.

I am not surprised that TFO is the favourite channel of Ontario's two- to 12-year-old francophones, far ahead of rivals like Radio-Canada and Télétoon. When an educational channel like TFO manages to be more popular with kids than cartoons, clearly they are doing something right.

The feedback we get about TFO from French-language stakeholders is overwhelmingly positive. In 2007-08, TFO received 2,500 phone calls and 1,200 e-mails from viewers. Most of these calls and e-mails were from viewers who wanted to thank TFO. In fact, TFO estimates that 90% of the feedback they get from the community is positive.

En parlant d'aspects positifs, l'éducation en langue française a de nombreux succès à célébrer de nos jours. Nous avons investi dans TFO et dans d'autres ressources pour aider nos élèves. Nous récoltons maintenant les fruits de ces investissements. Au cours des quatre dernières années le nombre d'élèves francophones de la province qui ont vu leur effort couronné de succès a augmenté.

We have closed the gap between English-language and French-language students for most of the key indicators we use that track student success. For example, 68% of French-language grade 6 students met the provincial standards in reading in 2006-07, a 10% increase from 2002-03. Some 83% of French-language students passed the grade 10 literacy test in 2006-07, a 4% point increase from 2002-03.

Ces résultats prouvent que nous pouvons transformer l'éducation en français en investissant dans les bons mécanismes de soutien, des mécanismes comme TFO car, comme je l'ai déclaré auparavant, TFO est bien plus qu'un outil d'apprentissage.

TFO plays a big role in spreading francophone Ontarian culture and providing positive reinforcement of francophone Ontarian identity and value, in all their diversity. This is why I urge my fellow members to support this legislation. TFO has been operating independently from TVO through an order in council for some time now, and with great success. This legislation would make TFO's self-governing status permanent and allow it to continue on its very successful path. This is the last step needed to complete the process of making TFO an independent entity. It is important that we do this, because we need TFO to continue to provide resources that meet the unique educational and cultural needs of Ontario francophone populations.

I think it's a very important initiative. Many people in this House spoke before, last time and hopefully this time, to create an independent TFO, to allow the large French community across the province of Ontario to enjoy and to restore their culture. As I mentioned, it is a very important continuation for the people who study French to go from the classroom to their home and turn on the TV so that they can watch a movie or a program and so that they can educate themselves and also get help if they need some help in math or chemistry or with whatever they need.

I think it's our duty to create some kind of mechanism, as I mentioned, for the many people who enjoy these programs on TV. I think it's about time. I feel the sense of this House that there is a positive support toward creating the independent entity at TFO, because it will serve our needs in the province of Ontario.

Very often when I go with a committee across the province to listen to many different people and stakeholders, they always tell us that they need their products, their information in French and that they need to get the message in French. Due to our support for the bilingual status in the province of Ontario, or to permit or to give the people access to information in this province, I think

that TFO will play a positive role to give us this tool and this mechanism to send our message to the francophone Ontarians. I think it's part of our duty as a province and as a government that committed for many years to support the francophone community across the province of Ontario.

This is especially true when it comes to health, because most of the time people cannot communicate in the English language. Sometimes they cannot get the message from the government in different areas. That's why they want the message to be conveyed to them in their own language. I think it's important to continue working together with the francophone community across the province of Ontario. Minister Meilleur, who is with us today and who is in charge of francophone affairs, is playing a pivotal role to spread this message among our caucus and also this House as a messenger for the francophones across the province, making sure all the people are being served in a professional manner, in a professional way.

1410

Today we are speaking about TFO. As you know, TFO, as a medium, becomes very important in our daily life. We can send whatever information we need, we can talk about many different issues, we can send educational materials, we can send health educational materials—all these important messages can be conveyed on that medium.

I think it's about time. TFO has been working almost independently for some time, and now we are working on the last step—this legislation—to permit TFO to be totally independent and able to continue serving the people of Ontario.

It's not just about TV or shows; it's also about websites and about programs. Educational programs can help students whenever they want. They can turn on the TV and watch the educational channel, and they can learn. From time to time, I go to the TFO website. I have found it very educational. I have learned many different things that I didn't know before. Also, the tools they use make it very simple and easy. Everyone who wants to learn the French language can turn on the TV or the website and learn more about it. I think it's very important, in this day, since technology has advanced and become creative, that we enjoy watching and, at the same time, learn. So it's about technology; it's about time; it's about the modern era.

I'm here today, all afternoon, and I will be paying attention to all my friends, all my colleagues on the different sides of the House. Hopefully they're going to stand and support this initiative and also put closure to this file, because it's a very important file. It's very important, as I mentioned, because we, as a government, are committed to give the francophone community across the province the tools they need to be integrated and to maintain the traditions of their culture. They have found out, and believe strongly, that TFO is one of the tools, one of the elements.

As you know, we have a lot of English channels made in Ontario, but we don't have many French channels. TFO is made in Ontario—all a product of Ontario—and I think francophone Ontarians deserve all the respect and all the support. By passage of this bill, we can help them restore their culture and traditions.

I think it's a very important bill, and, as I mentioned, I hope that all of us will join the government, the minister responsible for francophone affairs and the Minister of Education in supporting this bill, because it's important to us to maintain the culture and also to create the tools for people to learn and be educated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am pleased to have a moment to make a few comments with respect to the remarks by the minister and the member from London–Fanshawe.

Bill 55 has a very complicated name and a very long title—An Act to enact the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008 and make complementary amendments to the Ontario Educational Communications Authority Act—but the purpose is ultimately very clear: to finally completely separate and make independent TFO as the French-language educational corporation to operate alongside TVOntario. It has done excellent work over the years, and this is the final act that is going to completely separate it and make it truly independent.

I certainly support, and our party supports, the premise of the bill. I think it is long overdue, because we do have some 90,000 French-speaking students in Ontario, and I understand that more than half of the teachers in the French-language system already use the excellent programs and services that are being offered by TFO. So we certainly do support the premise.

We do have a few concerns that we hope will be answered during the course of this debate, one of which is with respect to the accountability mechanism and the funding mechanism. We hope that will be made clearer over time. It's also our hope that although TFO is going to be headquartered in Toronto, as I understand it, some consideration will be given to needs in some parts of the province that have a larger francophone population, such as the Niagara region, the Sudbury region, the Cornwall area and some of the other areas, to make sure that the benefit that is going to be arising from this act can be maximized for the benefit of all French-speaking people in the province of Ontario.

M. Gilles Bisson: Je vais avoir une occasion plus tard avec ma collègue de Nickel Belt, M^{me} Gélinas, pour parler de ce projet de loi. Certainement, les néo-démocrates vont accepter ce projet de loi pour être capables—comment dire?—d'assister et de s'assurer que le projet de loi va passer d'une manière assez vite. On pense qu'il est temps de faire cela. Je ne veux que dire à mon collègue de London–Fanshawe que je sais qu'il ne voulait pas dire, dans l'esprit qu'il l'a dit, que j'avais besoin—comment il l'a dit en anglais—« to help me restore my culture. » J'aimerais seulement dire que je n'ai jamais perdu ma culture. Je suis francophone et j'en

suis fier. Cela fait plus de 500 ans que mes ancêtres sont ici au Canada. Premièrement, ils sont arrivés au Québec, et au début des années 1900 ils sont venus à Timmins pour travailler dans les champs de bois, les camps de bois, comment disait mon grand-père Ovide, qui est venu travailler dans la région de Timmins.

Donc pour moi, TFO, ce n'est pas une question de « restore my culture »; c'est une question d'épanouir ma culture et de m'allouer, d'être capable, de pratiquer et d'être informé en français, d'aller rechercher les services nécessaires.

Une affaire que j'ai apprise il y a longtemps, c'est sur les choix que nous faisons dans notre vie. Moi, j'étais un jeune—et on m'en a parlé plus tard—élevé en français, qui a fait son secondaire en français. Mais à un point, quand j'étais arrivé dans la communauté ontarienne, je me suis assimilé comme les autres. Cela devient un choix : si tu veux être Francophone, Italien ou n'importe quoi, il faut que tu pratiques ta langue. Tu as besoin de la parler. Tu as besoin de vivre ta culture. C'est quelque chose qu'on ne peut pas simplement laisser à la porte avec maman et papa, et quand ça nous plaît d'aller voir nos parents, dire, « On est francophones », et avoir une belle tourtière dans le temps des fêtes et de la tire en automne. C'est une question de toujours pratiquer sa culture et de la vivre. Je vais avoir la chance d'en parler un peu plus tard.

M^me^ Laurel C. Broten: Je suis très fière de me joindre au débat et de donner mon appui au projet de loi 55. TFO, c'est certain, enrichit la culture franco-ontarienne. C'est une ressource indispensable au personnel enseignant, aux élèves et aux parents d'expression française. Mais TFO n'est pas seulement un outil d'apprentissage; c'est aussi une institution de base elle-même pour l'identité et la vitalité culturelle franco-ontarienne. Comme parent de deux enfants, maintenant je comprends bien les efforts que mes parents—un père anglophone et une mère fransaskoise—ont fait pour que l'on apprenne la langue française et que l'on comprenne notre culture francophone.

C'est certain que nous voulons que TFO continue à offrir des ressources qui répondent aux besoins uniques des élèves francophones. Et si le projet de loi est adopté, il accordera l'autonomie à TFO et fournira un meilleur soutien à nos élèves. C'est un pas en avant très important pour les enfants et leurs parents. Je comprends bien les efforts des parents anglophones ou francophiles en Ontario pour que leurs enfants apprennent la langue française. Dans notre maison, des programmes comme Toupie et Binou, et Arthur l'Aventurier, sont des mécanismes à assurer que nos garçons, Zachary et Ryan, s'engagent dans la langue française. Des livres Gilda la girafe ou Munsch, que l'on lit à la maison, sont utiles pour deux petits garçons de deux ans et demi qui apprennent une autre langue dans un milieu d'éducation francophone, et TFO fournit une grande partie de leur éducation. Alors, je suis très fière d'être ici aujourd'hui.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the minister responsible for francophone affairs and the member from London–Fanshawe on Bill 55, the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008.

Certainly this bill makes TFO an independent entity. It's worth noting that TFO does, at this time, already have its own board of directors and its own budget of approximately $23 million. It's based in Toronto. A Toronto office, to me, is a little surprising. I would have thought there might be consideration given to the office being located in the areas of the province that have more francophone members. Northeastern Ontario might be a natural location, and certainly northeastern Ontario, I'm sure, would appreciate government offices being located in one of the communities there.

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I know that the member from Burlington will be speaking to this bill, and the member from Thornhill, representing the Progressive Conservative Party. I do have some questions about the bill and will look forward to hearing them talk about it

I know that TFO does provide services for some 90,000 French-language students in the province, that nearly half of all Ontario's teachers rely on the French programming. Certainly in our family, all of my children have learned to speak French, something that I've always aspired to but haven't done myself.

We are generally supportive of this bill, but we do have lots of questions which we will want answered, and we want to see it go to committee as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Response?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais remercier les membres de London–Fanshawe, Whitby–Oshawa, Timmins–Baie James, Etobicoke–Lakeshore et Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Today, the government will deliver on its commitment to create an independent TFO that meets the specific cultural and educational needs of the francophone community.

Oui, en effet, la chaîne de télévision TFO n'est pas seulement une chaîne éducative, parce qu'il y a plusieurs émissions d'information publique comme Panorama, par exemple. Souvent la seule fois que les Franco-Ontariens se voient à la télévision ou que leur message est véhiculé, c'est à travers la chaîne de TFO. Alors, il y a beaucoup de gens qui ont été impliqués pour qu'aujourd'hui on parle en Chambre de l'indépendance de TFO.

Je voudrais remercier la nouvelle PDG de TFO, madame Claudette Paquin, qui a joué un rôle très important, et la présidente du conseil de l'administration Gisèle Chrétien. En fait, TFO est aussi un employeur, un employeur qui donne de l'emploi à nos nouveaux et nouvelles gradués soit de la Cité Collégiale, du Collège Boréal, de l'Université d'Ottawa, de l'Université Laurentienne. Il y a des gradués aussi de l'École secondaire publique De La Salle où j'étais samedi dernier pour célébrer leurs 25 ans. Alors il y a plusieurs personnes qui se sont données soit pour la création de La Chaîne dans les années 1987 et aussi pour l'émancipation

de TFO, l'émancipation des employés et qui raconte notre histoire—l'histoire franco-ontarienne dans tout l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'll be sharing my time with our party's education critic, the member from Burlington.

Je me lève aujourd'hui pour discuter du projet de loi 55, Loi de 2008 sur l'Office des télécommunications éducatives de langue française de l'Ontario.

En tant que critique de l'opposition officielle assigné aux affaires francophones, je salue tous les efforts de promotions de la langue et de la culture françaises. Dans mon rôle de critique, j'ai passé beaucoup de temps à étudier la culture francophone de notre province et de la comprendre.

Je me suis familiarisé avec les quelque 1,4 millions d'Ontariens qui ont une connaissance pratique du français, presque 11 % de la population ontarienne, avec les quelque 488 000 Ontariens dont la langue maternelle est le français, et avec les quelque 55 000 Ontariens qui sont francophones et ne parlent aucun anglais. Je me suis familiarisé avec des îlots francophones comme Sudbury, et certaines parties de la région de Niagara, où des portions de la population vivent en français. J'ai appris beaucoup sur les membres de la communauté francophone dont les seuls liens avec leur culture se vivent par le biais de l'internet et de la programmation de la chaîne TFO. J'ai regardé ce que se fait dans notre système d'éducation afin d'encourager le bilinguisme.

La province de l'Ontario a près de 90 000 étudiants qui apprennent le français dans près de 350 écoles. Selon le ministère de l'Éducation, « près de la moitié des enseignants ontariens utilisent la programmation de la chaîne TFO en classe », ce qui est approprié.

Il me fait énormément plaisir de constater que tant de jeunes apprennent le français et sa culture, notamment parce que j'ai grandi au Québec durant l'intense période de méfiance qui régnait alors que le séparatisme faisait rage dans les cœurs et les esprits de plusieurs et que tous pensaient que les deux peuples fondateurs du Canada se sépareraient à jamais plutôt que de continuer à grandir ensemble.

Nous applaudissons donc la chaîne TFO pour la façon dont elle s'est développée afin de devenir une ressource essentielle pour les étudiants et les enseignants dans les écoles de l'Ontario. La chaîne TFO a mis au point une programmation éducative primée qui aide les parents les enseignants également.

Tout commence par une trousse de départ préparée pour les parents d'enfants d'âge préscolaire et d'écoliers de la maternelle. La chaîne TFO offre 225 différents guides pour les enseignants; 15 000 ressources éducatives cataloguées par niveau et par sujet. De plus, la chaîne produit 4 000 programmes éducatifs pour les écoles françaises, dont 1 600 sont offerts gratuitement.

Toutes ces ressources sont disponibles sur leur site électronique. Les employés de la chaîne TFO consultent les parents et les enseignants et leur montrent à utiliser adéquatement les ressources offertes. Les Ontariens devraient être réellement impressionnés par la quantité de travail accomplie par la chaîne TFO pour produire sa programmation éducative. C'est une excellente utilisation des fonds publics parce que les Ontariens acquièrent ainsi une valeur tangible.

La façon dont la chaîne continue d'offrir ses ressources lui mérite pleinement la désignation de service public. Notre parti a l'intention d'appuyer le projet de loi 55.

I rise today to comment on Bill 55, the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008. As the opposition critic for francophone affairs, I commend any efforts that are made to promote the French language and culture. In my role as critic, I have spent a great deal of time studying and learning about the francophone culture of our province. I have become more familiar with the 1.4 million Ontarians who have a working knowledge of the French language, almost 11% of Ontario's population; more familiar with the 488,000 whose mother tongue is actually French; more familiar with the almost 50,000 Ontarians who are francophones and do not speak any English at all. I have learned about French pockets, communities like Sudbury and the Niagara region, where significant portions of the population are francophone. I have learned about these members of the francophone community whose only ties to their culture are through the Internet and the programming provided by TFO.

I have looked at our education system and have become aware of the work that is being done to encourage bilingualism. The province of Ontario has some 90,000 students from 350 schools who are learning the French language. According to the Ministry of Education, "Nearly half of Ontario's teachers regularly use TFO's programming in the classroom," and that is quite appropriate.

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It gives me great pleasure to see so many young people embracing the French language and culture, notably because I grew up in Quebec during the fiery era of mistrust, when separatism was on everyone's mind and everyone's lips, and many thought that the two founding cultures of Canada would grow apart and not together.

So we applaud the way in which TFO has organized itself to become an invaluable resource to both students and teachers alike in the classrooms of Ontario. TFO has created award-winning educational programs that help parents and teachers alike. It all begins with starter kits for parents of pre-school and kindergarten students. TFO provides 225 different teachers' guides; 15,000 educational resources, divided by grade and subject matter. In addition, TFO produces 4,000 educational programs for French-language schools, 1,600 of which are provided free of charge. All of these resources are available through their website. TFO staff also consult with parents and teachers, showing them how to use TFO's resources effectively.

The people of Ontario should be incredibly impressed with how much work TFO has put into its educational programming. It is good use of tax money because it creates value for Ontarians. The continuing resource base provided by TFO gives true meaning to the term "public service." Our party will be supporting Bill 55.

Although we will be supporting this bill, it doesn't mean we don't have several reservations about how the McGuinty government has handled this file. I want to outline concerns here, with the hope that the government will work on effective solutions. So I want to address the following issues.

In separating TFO, we have effectively created a new government department, complete with all the costs that go with that. Duplication of services could lead to reduced resources for other areas. You have to pick your battles, especially in these days of economic belt-tightening, which the McGuinty government likes to suggest are, at worst, a bump in the road.

What are the implications? The government failed to bring in this legislation prior to actually separating TFO from TVO. Coverage of this Legislature on both TVO and TFO is almost non-existent. Since taxpayers fund government-owned-and-operated networks, one could reasonably expect that the business of interpreting government to taxpaying citizens would be prime in the program makeup of these services.

This legislation legitimizes an entirely new department in the province of Ontario. The legislation calls for the creation of a new board of directors, plus regional councils and advisory committees. Will these appointments be more partisan appointments from a government famous for rewarding its friends with taxpayers' money? These are reasonable questions, given the track record of a tax-and-spend regime now entrenched in all aspects of Ontario's administration. Yes, we support all of the good that comes from what the bill intends, but we worry about the continued expansion of already bloated spending and a swelling provincial payroll.

Wherever we look, we see waste because of duplication. It's like school boards, hospitals and city councils. It's like lots of chiefs making lots of bucks. Everyone, it seems, requires a separate and duplicative infrastructure, with full support mechanisms. Money is spent many times over for parallel staff, equipment and properties. Administrative costs like additional auditors and more staff within ministries are needed just to oversee new departments. It's everywhere you look.

Where will the government get the money? Will we cut services? Premier McGuinty says he won't. Or will he increase taxes again, even if they are called fees or premiums? At the end of the day, who winds up paying all of these costs? No one can deny that after the basic income taxes we all pay, Ontarians already have to deal with the health premium, a tax that hurts poorer people, property taxes at the municipal level, the gasoline tax and the provincial sales tax. The only level of government I see currently thinking in terms of how much taxpayers can actually afford is the federal government. It at least makes efforts to allow citizens to put a little more back into their pockets.

In June 2006, the government announced that it would separate TFO from TVO. The government actually did separate TFO from TVO in May 2007. Two years after they announced their intention, we are debating legislation intended to formalize this act. This begs an obvious question: Why didn't the government bring this legislation in between June 2006 and May 2007? This reminds me of the man who is thinking about buying a new car. He tells his wife, and she asks if the family budget can afford it. They agree that they should visit the bank, review their affairs and then make a decision. But the next day, the man turns in to the driveway with a top-of-the-line 2008 BMW. The McGuinty government sat around for a year knowing this was coming, and what did they do? Nothing. Then the separation came along. Did they act? No. TFO has been a de facto separate entity since May 2007, almost a year to the day. That's two years of no plan, two years of no action.

Now there is action, at a cost, and before it has been discussed, debated or passed by this Legislature, which does have jurisdiction over it. All the while, TFO's legal status has been in limbo, because this government hadn't separated them from TVO in legal terms. So this bill isn't really a subject for debate; this bill is a fix.

Selon Claudette Paquin, le chef de la direction de la chaîne TFO, « La chaîne TFO est bien connue pour les services qu'elle offre aux étudiants de langue française, les enseignants et les parents. Elle est grandement appréciée par les francophiles à la grandeur de l'Ontario. Ce projet de loi représente l'étape finale dans la désignation officielle de TFO comme entité indépendante et autogérée de télédiffusion éducative. Nous espérons avec tout cœur que ce projet de loi sera adopté. »

Les membres de ce côté-ci de la Chambre sont d'accord avec l'évaluation que M^me^ Paquin fait de TFO. Sans aucun doute, et avec le soutien du parti, le projet de loi sera adopté, mais nous ne pouvons pas passer sous silence qu'il s'agit du travail d'un gouvernement arrogant, qui de plus en plus souvent met la charrue devant les bœufs et trouve ça normal. Ça ne l'est pas.

According to Claudette Paquin, the current CEO of TFO, "TFO is a well-recognized resource for French-language students, teachers and parents, and is greatly appreciated by francophiles across Ontario. This legislation is the last step to officially make TFO into an independent, self-governed educational broadcaster. We hope with all our hearts that the legislation will be passed."

We on this side of the House agree with Ms. Paquin's assessment of TFO, and undoubtedly, with the support of our party, it will be passed. But it cannot go unsaid that this is the work of an arrogant government that more and more often puts the cart before the horse and thinks that's just fine. Well, it isn't. After waiting two years for this legislation to be introduced, of course Mme. Paquin hopes this bill is passed. If you were her, Mr. Speaker, wouldn't you?

TFO is an organization whose efforts I support and applaud for what it does, but it is also an organization that has been purchasing property, acquiring assets and entering into contracts. How is it that we have departments splitting off from one another without legislative control? Can the minister explain who would be responsible in the case of a legal dispute? This sort of mismanagement begs the question: Who is actually running things? Is the minister running her department, or is the department running the minister? We have learned that with this government in control of taxpayers' money, the inmates are in control of the asylum. Clearly, this is a government that has no plan.

TVO et TFO sont financés en grande partie à partir des fonds publics. Le plus gros partie de leur programmation est éducatif ou alors à caractère significatif.

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J'ai mentionné tout à l'heure qu'il y a une exception. Il s'agit du manque chronique d'attention portée par nos deux télédiffuseurs aux débats de cette Chambre. Je fais référence aux télédiffuseurs ontariens dont nous discutons aujourd'hui et également aux télédiffuseurs financés par le gouvernement canadien : CBC ou Radio-Canada.

On peut également argumenter que ces organisations détiennent non seulement la responsabilité d'offrir aux Ontariens une couverture médiatique régulière et juste de ce qui se passe en Chambre, mais que leur responsabilité est plus grande que celle d'un télédiffuseur privé dans ce domaine. Leur responsabilité accrue est justifiée par le fait que les télédiffuseurs privés doivent se faire compétition pour attirer les auditeurs. La nature de cette compétition exige d'eux qu'ils présentent un contenu apprécié d'un auditoire plus vaste.

Les télédiffuseurs financés par les deniers publics reçoivent leurs budgets des fonds publics et ce sont ces fonds qui leur permettent d'offrir au public ontarien un contenu qui les fait approfondir leur connaissance de notre province.

Je crois qu'il est particulièrement important pour les membres de la communauté francophone d'avoir accès régulièrement aux débats de la Chambre sur la chaîne TFO. La chaîne qui présente les débats réguliers de la Chambre ne diffuse pas les débats en français. C'est inacceptable surtout que nous entendons souvent le gouvernement de monsieur McGuinty faire état de son soutien des droits de la communauté francophone. Pour la plupart de ceux qui appartiennent à la communauté francophone, la chaîne TFO représente la meilleure fenêtre sur les nouvelles provinciales d'importance.

Il n'est pas étonnant que ce gouvernement veuille limiter l'accès des francophones à ce qui se passe ici étant donné leur piètre rendement. Mais, ce gouvernement a l'obligation d'offrir aux Ontariens de l'information régulière et juste, et il en a les moyens.

Both TVO and TFO receive the bulk of their funding from the people of Ontario. For the most part, they provide either educational or highly relevant programming. I have mentioned that there is an exception, and that is the incredibly poor coverage that the proceedings in this House receive from both our public broadcasters. I refer to the Ontario-operated networks we were discussing here today and also to the Canadian government-funded CBC and Radio-Canada. One might argue that these organizations not only have a responsibility to provide the people of Ontario with timely and accurate access to what happens in this chamber, but that they have a greater responsibility than a private broadcaster might.

The reason they have a greater obligation is that a private broadcaster must compete for listeners or viewers. Competition requires them to provide content that is marketable to a broader audience. The government-funded broadcasters are subsidized by taxpayer dollars, and it is this subsidy that enables them to provide content to the people of Ontario that enhances their knowledge of our province.

I believe it is especially important for members of the francophone community to have regular access to the proceedings here on TFO. The regular legislative channel does not produce the proceedings of this House in French. That is appalling, considering how often we hear the McGuinty government claim to support the rights of the francophone community. For many in the francophone community, TFO represents the best access they will have to provincially relevant news.

Given the performance of this government, I understand why they would want to limit how much access francophone people have to what happens here. But this government has an obligation to provide timely and accurate information to Ontarians, and it does have the means. I wonder if my fellow members even know what the level of coverage of these proceedings is on these channels, which we control on behalf of and for the benefit of Ontarians.

On TFO, there is no coverage of the proceedings of this House outside of their daily news program. TVO in English does a little better, but not much better. Question period is on daily from 3 a.m. to 4 a.m. on TVO. I wonder how many Ontarians set their alarm clocks for that. Come to think of it, probably about the same number who'll watch it live on the Legislature at its new prime time of 10:45 a.m., but that's another debate. There is no other access on TVO to current provincial political debate, except when the excellent Steve Paikin does a program on provincial politics.

This is the government that cancelled Studio 2 and replaced it with a format that wouldn't have as many opportunities to embarrass this government. In fact, many have speculated that the sole reason for the change at TVO was the consistent yet legitimate criticisms of the government's performance. This government's actions when dealing with our publicly funded broadcasters seem to be consistent with how they handle every other issue: partisan politics before good public policy.

I support all efforts to provide access to alternate language and cultural programming. In fact, as the member for Thornhill, I have the honour of representing one of the most culturally diverse ridings in Canada.

According to Stats Canada, in Ontario there are 266,000 people who speak neither French nor English. Of those 266,000, 26,600—or exactly 10%—live in Markham and Vaughan, in my riding. There are 145 languages spoken in Thornhill. I have been in Hindu temples, Muslim mosques, Ultra Orthodox Jewish synagogues, a Filipino social club, a Korean community centre, and to Chinese events of all kinds. And that's just the tip of the iceberg in one small community of Ontario.

I hold community round tables that are ethnocentric. No matter which community, they all express the burning need for resources to maintain and share their cultures. So what are we doing about that? One of the highest priorities of this government should be finding better ways to integrate newcomers into our society. Could we improve adult ESL, for example, on government-funded TV channels? I suggest that the answer is yes. Just an idea, but given that this bill was jointly introduced by the minister responsible for francophone affairs and the Minister of Education, I would certainly hope so.

Immigrants represent the future of Canada and, indeed, the future of Ontario. We don't make enough babies anymore. If that requires any proof, visit Thornhill with me. This government should be developing new ways to help promote and share cultures, new cultures with the newcomers—and we just came up with one.

So what's it going to be—more cricket club grants or a meaningful plan on how to promote and maintain the cultural diversity of our communities?

J'aimerais terminer en soulignant le long et riche passé de la francophonie ici en Ontario. Les francophones ont élevé des générations d'enfants ici, travaillé et contribué à la construction de notre province. Le Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario s'est toujours battu pour promouvoir et célébrer cette culture ici en Ontario et continuera à le faire. Ce projet de loi, même s'il arrive tard, permettra d'assurer aux francophones de cette province que l'accès continue au contenu médiatique dans leur propre langue. Je crois sincèrement que nous pouvons tous appuyer ce projet, mais j'aimerais quand même rappeler au gouvernement que le pouvoir de ce que nous avons créé dépasse amplement le concept d'origine. Utilisons ce pouvoir sagement.

In closing, francophone people have a long, rich heritage here in Ontario. They have raised generations of children here. They've worked hard, and they've helped to build our province. The Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario has fought and will continue to fight to ensure that their culture is promoted and celebrated here in Ontario. This bill, although late, will help to ensure that the francophone people of this province have continued access to media content in their own language. I believe it is indeed something that we can all support, but I again would remind the government that the power of what we have created goes well beyond what is envisioned. Let us use it wisely.

1450

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 55, the Ontario French-language Education Communications Authority Act, 2008—it is a mouthful.

My colleague from Thornhill has illustrated our caucus's support for TFO and the importance of the francophone community to the social fabric of our province. The member from Thornhill has also shared some of our areas of concern with the current draft of Bill 55. It is my hope that, as this piece of legislation moves forward through the clause-by-clause process and in particular through public consultation, necessary changes are made to realize the full potential of Bill 55.

I wish to reinforce several of the points made by the member from Thornhill and to expand on issues that fall within the purview of my portfolio as education critic.

Ontario has a rich multilingual heritage, in particular our francophone community, which was instrumental in the creation of this great province. Our northern communities, descendants of the coureurs des bois, have a strong and vibrant francophone culture that is alive and well today. Together with the francophone community in south Niagara, these two groups form the largest concentration of francophones outside Quebec. We, as legislators, need to ensure that these francophone communities, together with French-language schools throughout Ontario, have the tools they need to share their language and culture with the next generation.

TFO also offers a comforting welcome to the new and expanding francophone immigrant community in Ontario, which derives great benefit from the educational programming. New Ontarians who arrive here from all corners of the globe with French as their mother tongue will find a connection to the place of their birth, a medium that speaks to them in their own language, and hopefully an opportunity to learn more about their new homeland.

I commend TFO for the invaluable resources it has provided and continues to provide to the over 90,000 francophone students in this province. In addition to enhancing the educational experiences of our francophone students, over half of Ontario's teachers use TFO programming in their classrooms.

My colleague has eloquently defined the benefits and importance of TFO to the social fabric of our province and has raised some of the concerns that we, as a PC caucus, currently have with Bill 55.

During the tenure of the McGuinty government, we have witnessed a sharp decline in the accountability of ministers in this government with regard to the programs under their jurisdiction. From the children's aid society, to Caledonia, to the year-end Liberal slush fund, accountability to taxpayers has clearly been a distant concern to the McGuinty cabinet, if at all.

In keeping with the importance of accountability to taxpayers, I understand that the governing authority of TFO is to make reports to the minister. Aside from the obligatory annual business plan for the fiscal year, there

are no established timelines for the submission of reports to the minister.

I come from a report-driven organization. Any organization of the size and scope of the province of Ontario must also be report-driven. How else can we possibly keep tabs on everything? It is my hope that firm time frames for reports will be established by the ministry so that all parties can be thoroughly accountable to the Ontario taxpayers. The left hand must know what the right hand is doing if we are to remain accountable to the taxpayers and make the right decisions in their best interests.

I would appreciate the Minister of Education's clarification regarding another issue of accountability. There appear to be several ministers and government representatives who are authorized to release funding to TFO; in fact, there may be too many. The TFO authority is answerable to the Minister of Education, and it is the Minister of Education who approves the annual business plan and hopefully receives various reports throughout the year. TFO has its own accounting system with provincial/federal contributions and membership revenue flowing into their separate account. My cause for concern revolves around the Lieutenant Governor's ability to authorize the Minister of Finance to advance amounts to TFO out of the general revenue fund of the province. It appears inconsistent that a government representative, who is not responsible for the oversight of the TFO authority, would be granted the power to direct funds to TFO.

I'm not questioning the LG's ability to act in the best interests of the people of this province, but it is inefficient and unfair to task two busy representatives of the government with multiple responsibilities for TFO. The verification of information will cause unnecessary delays, as representatives for TFO are required to secure information from two divisions of the government to achieve one goal. As legislators, our goal should be to create thoughtful, necessary and complete policies, not to complicate the matter with unnecessary twists and turns and regulations.

I found further cause for concern—and one that I have to say is appalling to include in this legislation. Under the legal section of the bill, the clause reads as follows: that if the authority has unpaid judgments after making all reasonable efforts to pay, then the Minister of Finance will pay from the consolidated revenue fund the remainder. What kind of message are we sending to the taxpayers of Ontario? This is how the McGuinty government goes about establishing legal, financial criteria? I do not believe that it is fiscally prudent that legislators build in default plans for loans or fiscal irresponsibility on the part of agencies. If the government makes it clear from the outset that it is ready, willing and able to absorb any debt or defaulted payments, what incentive is there to be fiscally responsible?

To be clear, my question is not a reflection on the accounting standards of the TFO authority. It is a statement in general, both as an MPP and as a taxpayer, in respect to all legislation created in this chamber, that we do not continue to build in escape clauses for financial mismanagement. Instead, we should be very clear that the funding we commit to a project, be it one-time or base funding, should be utilized accordingly and in keeping with the budget that has been submitted by that organization. The taxpayers in Ontario expect us to hold our organizations to account, and our legislation should respect that understanding.

For over 24 years, I was not only responsible for assisting to draft local legislation but was accountable to the rules and regulations set out by this province, which authorized the bylaws that constituted our legal framework of operation.

I again seek clarification from the minister regarding the powers section of this legislation.

The TFO board of directors creates and submits bylaws to the Minister of Education for approval. However, the bylaws take effect two weeks after filing. Everyone here in the chamber knows that the minister will not have had the opportunity to review or approve those bylaws within a short, two-week-window period. My concern is that the TFO board will allocate funds and resources to the implementation and execution of the new bylaws two weeks after they have been filed. If the minister rejects the new bylaws or suggests changes after they have already been implemented, then scarce resources will have been wasted because the process is flawed. The axiom that it's better to beg forgiveness than to ask for permission should not be codified in this legislation. If that continues to be the case, imagine how many new taxes the Premier would dream up, or user fees, as he prefers to call them, if he didn't have to bother with that pesky little process of informing the people first.

I continue to be puzzled by the division of responsibility between the LG and the minister. This is an ad hoc arrangement at best, and does not appear to serve the interests of the TFO organization or the taxpayer. For instance, is it the LG, not the minister, who has the authority to establish a subsidiary? TFO is going to have a budget for a government relations adviser just to sort out the multiple layers of bureaucracy built into this legislation.

1500

Why is it hard for the McGuinty government to develop a streamlined, cost-effective and efficient process? It seems that whenever this administration sticks its nose into an issue, it's like herding cats; everyone and everything is scattered in all directions. Instead of offering a simple, straightforward chain of command that TFO and its board could clearly and easily follow, the McGuinty government offers convoluted delineations between the Ministry of Education and the LG's office. When there is no clear-cut final decision-maker, omissions, crossed wires and costly errors can occur. It is our hope, on this side of the floor anyway, that the McGuinty government finally takes the bull by the horns and digs in to fix the mess it is creating.

At the end of the day, there is only one taxpayer. I was very mindful of that fact at the regional level and, believe me, I have not lost sight of this in this chamber.

In speaking to the issue of the funding model, the lion's share of financing does come from the province of Ontario. The federal government is a contributing partner and the balance, of course, of the TFO budget is derived directly from cable subscribers—once again, three funding sources but only one taxpayer.

The TVO budget prior to the split with TFO was $84 million, of which the taxpayers of this province and the country contributed $68.5 million. The significance of this sum would indicate a certain responsibility to offer educational programming that brings federal and provincial issues into the mainstream content.

There used to be significant coverage of these issues and legislation that appeared before the Ontario Legislature and the Canadian Parliament on the acclaimed TVO program Studio 2. Despite the fact that taxpayers of Ontario form the largest contributors to the TVO coffers, Studio 2 was dropped from the program schedule. One would think that the demise of a program featuring politicians would slip quietly into the night with little fanfare. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Shockingly enough, the taxpayers of Ontario actually enjoy watching a more comprehensive, less adversarial discussion of the issues that directly affect them, their families and their community. They were justifiably upset when the program was removed from the airwaves.

I am continually impressed with the number of my constituents who regularly watch question period. Mr. Speaker, I venture to guess that you may even have to wear sunglasses to hide your celebrity from time to time in the grocery store.

Shortly, the proceedings of the Legislature will be available on the Internet, but for our rural and northern constituencies, their dial-up Internet access is not going to cut the mustard. Right now, if you want to watch proceedings of this Ontario Legislature on TVO or TFO, the same organizations that receive the majority of their funding from this level of government, you're going to have to set your alarm clock very early—3 a.m., to be precise. To my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, you have not slapped a parental advisory on question period as yet, although it has come close a few times. Inappropriate content aside, I cannot think of any other reason why the Ontario Legislature would be on TVO and TFO at 3 in the morning.

My caucus colleagues and I are not suggesting that TVO and TFO use their prime-time slots for government programming; it's exactly the contrary. As a mother and a grandmother, I would like to see children's programming on throughout the day and also the early evening. The current quality of children's programming on TVO and TFO stations is of a very high calibre. However, at 8 p.m., when most kids are headed to bed, it is not unreasonable to expect that the programming switch to a more adult content and keep the taxpayers abreast of the decisions that have affected them in their everyday lives. The notion that people may in fact miss programming that keeps them up to date on the working initiatives of their government can be supported by a corresponding decline in membership revenue. I don't know if you are aware, but memberships dropped from a healthy 100,000 memberships to 65,000 memberships at the end of 2004-05, directly after Studio 2 was dropped from the TVO/TFO lineup. Over one third of the viewers left the TVO/TFO family as a result of that programming decision.

Clearly, the people of the province of Ontario want to have access to their elected representatives. I'm not suggesting that the government begin to interfere in TVO/TFO programming decisions. I am suggesting that the talented, creative minds in this medium get together and offer young people a glimpse into the workings of government on their level. The United States has been very successful in this form of programming in the past. Their youth understand the political processes and many are actually engaged in it, as we've witnessed throughout this primary season.

My daughter and her friends could probably recite the educational shorts that appeared frequently on the ABC channel. One of my favourites was on how a bill became a law. It's an animated feature of a bill and the process that the bill travels to become law. The intended recipient of the message does not immediately identify the cartoon as an overtly political or educational tool, as it's really too fun to be good for you. They just knew it had a catchy lyric and a story of the bill that was engaging. That is the kind of information about government that I would expect to see, as would my caucus colleagues, from an organization whose focus is educational programming but also receives a majority of funding from this government body.

TVO has three stated priorities:

(1) to help children become successful learners;

(2) to help parents take an active role in their children's education; and

(3) to create adult programming geared towards citizenship and social issues.

Are the taxpayers of Ontario really taking full advantage of the rights inherent in their citizenship? Are they up to speed on the latest social issues affecting our communities? I would argue that they are not, as in election after election, voter turnout drops to abysmal levels. Perhaps if the people of Ontario understood the ins and outs of government, the opportunities that they have to participate in the democratic process, then the number of people at the ballot box would increase.

Likewise, Canadian history is perceived as a narcoleptic's dream come true, but we do have an exciting and interesting story to share with our youth. We just need to present it to them in a way that speaks to them, in a medium that attracts their attention and captivates their imagination.

While I believe that the Ontario Legislature, her representatives and the issues that we are dealing with are not adequately covered, TFO is doing an excellent job fulfilling their first two priorities. The Magic School Bus and the adventures of Miss Frizzle's class are extra-

ordinary and serve to complement and enhance the school curriculum. Success in the classroom is often about creativity, and TFO offers educators a unique teaching tool that connects with the children and reinforces their lessons. The Magic School Bus is only one of 4,000 educational TV programs available to French-language schools. Some 1,600 are free to the Internet, and TFO also offers 225 pedagogical guides for teachers.

TFO is a fabulous resource for our educators, parents and our children, but what suggestions can we offer to assist this organization to preserve and promote the French language and culture? I found it disturbing and short-sighted that the McGuinty government mandated that the TFO offices be located in Toronto. In the 2007 election, our leader John Tory and our PC caucus pledged to move a portion of government jobs outside of the Toronto area to spread civil service opportunities around the province. Clearly, the McGuinty government is not so inclined and, judging by this administration's neglect of our rural and northern communities, has no intention of supporting communities outside of the greater Toronto area. The loss of manufacturing and industrial jobs has hit the north and the Niagara regions particularly hard. Here was a win-win situation right on the Premier's doorstep and he chose to step right over it in favour of throwing Toronto yet another bone.

1510

The decision to locate the offices of TFO in Nipissing, the Nickel Belt or Niagara should not be based strictly on the fact that these communities have been hard hit by job losses. There are job losses all the way across Ontario. No, there's more to it than that. These three communities constitute the second- and third-largest francophone populations outside of Quebec in Canada.

In Niagara, the francophone community has recently experienced another loss. The French-language division of CBC closed their offices in Welland. This closure occurred at a time when the francophone community has undergone a resurgence of grassroots support. Bonjour Niagara is focused on attracting Quebec tourists to the Niagara region to experience the various festivals and events and a francophone agricultural-culinary trail. It would be a tremendous boost to this particular community if they could showcase their initiatives to francophones across the province and potentially across Canada.

TFO is uniquely positioned to connect francophones in remote locations, or those who live in a predominantly anglophone community, with larger francophone individuals in other parts of our province. We could help these strong, vibrant communities reach their full potential by simply moving some office space.

The citizens of Sudbury identify themselves as a truly bilingual community, with over 40% of the population identifying themselves as bilingual and 28% listing French as their mother tongue. Our northern communities have not received the same amount of attention as our southern communities' urban counterparts by this McGuinty government.

The Minister of Education could have supported the culture and language of our northern francophone population by giving them this opportunity to bid on this project or put forward and argue for locating bilingual services up there in their region. Instead, this government has mandated in legislation that the offices of TFO be located in Toronto. The McGuinty government is the doting parent on a favourite child, while the rest of Ontario seems to receive scraps. One way to preserve and protect the French language and culture is to show communities across Ontario what a vibrant, active francophone community really looks like.

As I was examining the role of francophone resources in our public and separate school systems, I found an interesting difference that I hope the minister can explain. The separate schools begin their francophone programming at a much earlier age than the public board. Grade 1 is the typical level at which French language and culture is introduced to the separate school students. By contrast, public school students do not usually receive French instruction until about grade 3. If the McGuinty government is intent on not only preserving the French language but also promoting it, I would encourage the minister to investigate the haphazard application in French-language programming in schools across Ontario. This loosey-goosey introduction of the French language in our school systems speaks to the inconsistencies that continually crop up throughout this administration.

It is my expectation as a legislator, the education critic and as a grandmother who will have a student in the public education system in the near future that the French-language curriculum be applied equally among the school boards. Separate school students are getting a two-year advance on average in comparison to their public school counterparts. The minister should be ensuring that a level playing field exists among the students in her charge, particularly if the minister is focused on preserving and promoting French language and culture. It would be interesting to see how many students from the public system enter French immersion in comparison to the separate board.

I wish to be very clear about what my expectations for the distance-education portion of Bill 55 are. Access to distance education is extremely important, again, to our forgotten northern and rural communities. It is disturbing to me and to my caucus colleagues that the minister may permit TFO to charge fees for this distance education. The bill reads, "The authority shall not charge a fee ... in respect of a student resident in Ontario unless the minister has approved the amount of the fee." The bill should state, "The authority shall not charge any fee at all in respect of a student resident in Ontario."

This should not be a grey area at all. The Minister of Education should know better. The TFO is funded in large part by the province, through the Ministry of Education. Ontario students should not be paying extra for resources and programs that are already funded through the Ministry of Education. This issue is one of fundamental fairness, something the McGuinty government

professes to understand. Charging an Ontario student a fee for a program supported by the government is double-dipping. They have already paid for that service once as a taxpayer and are now being asked to pay for that service again as a student. This government loves a user fee and seems to inject them anywhere they can. I am serving the ministers notice that I will not stand by and watch our students pay the price for poorly constructed legislation.

The TFO has been operating as a separate entity for approximately a year now. Clearly, the McGuinty government is as slow as molasses in January. If our government-funded agencies simply cannot wait for the government to keep pace, I would prefer that the chicken come before the egg. However, in this case, we must perform our due diligence in order to ensure that TFO has the operational mandate that meets the needs of its viewers.

While some of my comments and concerns regarding Bill 55 are procedural in nature, the one issue that is the hardest to swallow in the mandating of TFO is the mandating of TFO offices in Toronto. I feel that by codifying the office location, we are doing a disservice to our significant francophone communities across Ontario. TFO is an incredible resource whose programming and relevancy would only be enhanced by its presence in a strong, vibrant francophone community. I encourage the representatives of these francophone communities to raise this issue to the committee process, and I welcome them to contact myself, my colleague from Thornhill and the minister to share their thoughts on this issue.

If government is to be truly accessible to the people it serves, then the McGuinty government should realize that it serves the interests of all Ontarians, even those who live outside of the GTA.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss Bill 55. I look forward to hearing from the stakeholders during that very important public process. It is my hope that the francophone community in particular will take the opportunity to consult with us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

M. Gilles Bisson: Je suis content qu'il y a du support à travers l'Assemblée, dans les trois partis, aujourd'hui pour la création de TFO comme sa propre organisation, son propre maître chez lui quand ça vient aux services que l'on donne à travers TFO. Quand j'écoutais les discours que le Parti conservateur vient de donner, je me trouvais des fois un peu entre deux débats : on dit sur un point que oui, on croit qu'il est important d'avoir une TFO autonome, mais ils veulent en faire, à l'intérieur, une organisation bilingue, si j'ai bien compris. Mais ce n'est pas ça que la communauté francophone avait demandé. J'écoutais les députés conservateurs, qui disaient qu'il y aura peut-être une duplication si on aura une administration séparée. Écoute, l'idée d'avoir une organisation autonome, c'est que tu pourras prendre tes propres décisions faisant affaire à tes valeurs comme organisation, et que les francophones dans la province pourront se trouver chez eux à TFO; faire cela à l'intérieur d'une administration conjointe nous ramènerait là où on était déjà il y a deux ou trois ans. Donc, j'apprécie le support qu'on a de la part des députés conservateurs, dans le sens qu'ils vont voter pour ce projet de loi. Mais je veux être très clair que je ne suis pas en faveur d'avoir une administration jointe. On veut avoir une administration séparée, comme on a fait avec TFO. Eux, ils sont autonomes.

Je vais avoir une chance plus tard d'en parler en plus en détails, et j'apprécie l'opportunité de donner ces commentaires.

1520

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I rise today to speak in support of the TFO legislation. There are two very important reasons that I support this legislation. The first is that I represent the riding of Ottawa Centre, which is a designated bilingual riding. Ten per cent of the people who live in Ottawa Centre—11,690 people, in actuality—are francophone, and 37%, or 41,150 people, are officially bilingual. So it's a riding with quite a significant French population and a riding that takes its bilingual heritage very seriously. We need to make every effort to ensure that we increase the number of bilingual residents in my riding of Ottawa Centre by teaching them and by providing tools to learn French.

The second very important reason I support this legislation is that I am somebody who is also going through the process of learning French. I'm making myself trilingual, in fact, and officially bilingual. For some years, I have been taking French lessons, as a promise I made to the minister responsible for francophone affairs that I will one day be officially bilingual. I have used TFO—the website and the programming—as a resource and a tool to learn French.

I'm sure there are a lot of people in my riding of Ottawa Centre who rely on TFO in various French schools and at home to ensure that they have the necessary tools. This legislation ensures that French remains vibrant and not only that we learn about the French language, but also about Franco-Ontarian heritage, which is very much a part of our Ontario and Canadian culture.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member from Dufferin–Caledon got up first.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Your time will come.

I want to start by acknowledging the speeches by my colleagues from Thornhill and Burlington. Once we, as legislators, acknowledge our desire here to make TFO separate from TVO, we must have a thorough understanding of what this means to Ontario taxpayers and to those of us who wish to promote the French language in Ontario.

While we cannot micromanage the programs chosen by TFO and TVO, and do not wish to, I must say that I am disappointed by the recent decision by TFO to close their Queen's Park bureau. I quote from Christina Blizzard: "But in an ominous move, TVO recently closed its Queen's Park bureau. This came as a shock to many long-time journalists around here." She goes on to say,

"It seems an unusual move. After all, it seemed logical that a public broadcaster funded by the provincial government would put a heavy accent on provincial politics."

It ties in to a resolution my colleague from Nepean–Carleton has brought forward, talking about the fact that we would like to have the provincially funded cable stations TVO and TFO broadcast the daily question period in order to provide all residents of Ontario, particularly those in rural Ontario, with access to the daily proceedings—I'm sure the member did not mean at 3 a.m.

I think it's important that we encourage TVO and TFO to publicize question period and, ideally, debates, because that is the only opportunity for the vast majority of voters in Ontario to view the responses of the government without the filter of the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Nickel Belt.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Moi aussi, j'aimerais féliciter le membre de Thornhill, ainsi que la députée de Burlington pour son appui au projet de loi. C'est encourageant de voir qu'il y a certains projets de loi qui peuvent recevoir l'appui des trois partis, et ça a l'air d'en être un.

Depuis plusieurs années, TFO développe sa programmation de façon indépendante. On a après ça mis des membres d'un conseil d'administration indépendant. Certainement, je suis toujours fière de mentionner madame Gisèle Chrétien, qui est la coprésidente et qui vient de mon comté. On a également donné un budget indépendant à TFO afin qu'elle puisse mettre en œuvre son mandat. Et, comme j'ai déjà mentionné, j'étais très fière de participer à l'ouverture officielle de ces nouveaux locaux. Pas loin d'ici, d'ailleurs, on est en train de former à même la grande ville de Toronto une communauté francophone avec les locaux de TFO, les locaux des centres de santé communautaire, les locaux du Centre francophone de Toronto, ainsi que l'aide juridique francophone. Donc, c'est encore là quelque chose de très bien. Et maintenant, avec ce projet de loi 55 sur l'Office des télécommunications éducatives de langue française de l'Ontario, TFO va devenir un organisme permanent et indépendant. C'est une progression qui a été lente, mais qui a en valu la peine et qui pourra certainement, pour les années à venir, aider l'épanouissement et la vitalité de la communauté francophone.

Donc, de notre côté, on va être contents de l'appuyer.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Response? The member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: As my talk suggested, along with my colleague the member for Burlington, this really isn't a good versus bad situation that we're discussing. This is a situation of how to and how much, more than anything else. TFO certainly gives us the tools to teach. In the future, I would just like to see the facts following the legislation, rather than the legislation following the de facto creation of an organization. It begs the question of, as I mentioned when I spoke, who is running the enterprise? That to me at this point is not clear. We've got two ministries talking to us, we've got a board of directors that has been split but doesn't really have the legal power until we pass this bill, and I'd like to see that nailed down.

In response to a couple of the members who spoke, the member for Timmins–James Bay raised an interesting point about our party being somewhat hot and cold. On the one hand, we agree with the concept. We simply say we agree with the idea and we will vote yes, but we have expressed and we continue to express concern over the control of this exercise.

In terms of what the member for Ottawa Centre had to say, his points made sense entirely to me. If he wants to learn French, TVO is certainly a good place. When this bill was introduced, I spoke of getting my French up to snuff by watching Panorama. Again, it is not about the how; it's about the why.

My colleague from Dufferin–Caledon cited as well the bureau shutdown, which was a salient aspect of what both I and my colleague from Burlington had to say. If you want to connect with the population and you're funded by the Ontario government, it makes eminent sense to run a bureau in Queen's Park, and the first line of education for the population of Ontario would be carrying the proceeds of this particular Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

M. Gilles Bisson: Je veux premièrement dire que je vais partager notre temps avec la membre de Nickel Belt, madame Gélinas.

Avec ça, j'aimerais commencer en disant, comme néodémocrate et comme francophone—et je parle pour le reste du caucus—que le caucus NPD va supporter cette législation. Cela a toujours été une question pour nous de quelque chose qui avait besoin d'être fait. Justement, comme la ministre va savoir, c'est quelque chose que nous, à ce bord ici de la Chambre, ont toujours demandé au gouvernement de faire. Que c'est fait aujourd'hui, peut-être que ça aurait été fait un peu plus tôt, mais que ça va se faire, c'est ça qui est l'important. On va donner l'appui.

Je veux parler un peu sur le point non seulement de l'importance de TFO pour la communauté francophone, mais je veux donner un aperçu de ce que c'est, être francophone dans la province de l'Ontario. Le monde a besoin de comprendre que d'être francophone, ce n'est pas seulement que tu est né d'une famille francophone. C'est quelque chose que tu as besoin de vivre.

1530

Sans des organisations comme TFO, comme nos centres communautaires francophones, comme nos écoles, comme nos institutions postsecondaires comme l'Université de Hearst, College Boréal et j'en passe, c'est pas mal difficile de vivre en français. Si tu n'as pas ces organisations, tu n'as pas en place l'habilité de vivre en français dans cette province.

Je veux donner un peu de l'histoire de ce qui m'est arrivé et de ce qui m'a vraiment boulversé, à un certain point de ma vie, dans le sens que je n'avais pas réalisé que j'étais devenu assimilé. C'est l'expérience de beaucoup de jeunes francophones qui demeurent dans des

régions désignées sous la Loi 8, comme Timmins ou Ottawa ou autres, mais qui se trouvent un peu, même s'ils sont majoritaires—moi, d'où je viens, dans mon comté, les francophones sont majoritaires, mais encore, on est porté à parler l'anglais. Pourquoi? Parce qu'il y a plus de francophones qui parlent l'anglais que d'anglophones qui parlent le français. C'est bien simple.

Si tu rejoins des amis sur la rue, avec peut-être cinq ou six jeunes francophones qui jasent ensemble, mais t'as deux ou trois anglophones avec vous qui ne comprennent pas ton langage, pour communiquer, tu parles en anglais. Il y a moins d'anglophones qui parlent le français, quelque chose que j'espère qu'une belle journée on pourrait voir diminuer, puis on voit justement, même dans cette Assemblée, beaucoup de personnes qui ne sont pas francophones de souche, qui ont appris le français après. Je pense qu'il y a du monde qui a fait beaucoup de progrès, mais je veux dire qu'on en a encore à faire.

Mon expérience : Je viens de Timmins. Mes grands-parents des deux bords étaient francophones. Mon grand-père, Ovide Bisson, vint de la province de Québec au début des années 1900 pour établir son entreprise forestière dans la ville de Timmins sur le lac Nighthawk. Il élevait une famille de neuf enfants, frères et soeurs, qui ont, eux, démeuré dans la région de Timmins pour un temps. D'autres sont partis. Le point, c'est que sur le bord de mon père, c'étaient des francophones.

Sur le bord de ma mère, c'étaient des Lehout. Les Lehout, comme les Bisson, sont arrivés au Canada droit au début des années 1600 et étaient parmi les premières familles à arriver sur les deux bords.

On est très fiers chez nous de la manière que j'ai appris, quand j'étais un petit gars, nos traditions francophones et notre langue et notre culture. Donc, j'étais élevé avec la vieilletradition : les chansons à répondre, la bouffe, les fêtes qu'on a eues dans le temps de Noël, la manière dont on fait des affaires au Carême, la manière dont on faisait les affaires quand on avait quelqu'un à baptiser ou quand il y avait des noces ou même quand quelqu'un était décédé. On vivait une communauté francophone dans notre famille.

Moi, je n'avais jamais pensé pour deux secondes que j'étais anglophone. J'ai toujours pensé que j'étais francophone. Mais ce que j'avais réalisé à un assez jeune âge, quand je suis arrivé au secondaire même si j'allais à une école francophone dans le temps—à cette heure, on appelle ça l'école secondaire Thériault; c'était le début de Sacré Coeur, qui est devenue l'école secondaire Thériault, la plus grande école secondaire dans la province présentement. Même si je suis allé à l'école en français, quand je suis allé sur la rue parfois, on était anglophone. On parlait plus l'anglais sur la rue qu'on ne parlait le français. La seule place qu'on parlait le français, c'était dans notre famille, ou on va dire à l'école. Il n'y avait pas beaucoup d'occasions d'utiliser ton français, mais nous autres, on pensait, "Alors, j'ai 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 ans. Ce n'est pas important," parce qu'on savait qui on était. "Mon nom est Bisson. Je suis francophone. C'est la fin de l'histoire." On n'y a pas pensé pour deux minutes.

Eventuellement, ma femme et moi, on s'est trouvés, comme on dit. Ca fait 32 ans que nous sommes mariés. Elle aussi est francophone. Elle est une Beauchamps. Comme vous le savez, c'est une famille de longue date qui est arrivée au Canada dans les années 1600 aussi, puis on peut tracer les racines des Beauchamps juste à la ville de Québec, vers 1650 environ, 1656.

Le point que je fais, c'est que dans ma famille chez nous, quand j'étais un petit gars, et dans la famille de mon épouse et moi qu'on a eue ensemble, nos deux filles Julie et Natalie Bisson—deux francophones aussi—on s'est toujours pensés francophones.

Mais le fait que j'ai réalisé à un point de ma vie, c'est que, quand j'étais au collège—parce qu'il n'y avait pas de collèges francophones dans le temps, c'était seulement des collèges francophones—et quand j'étais au milieu de travail, le travail, c'était tout en anglais. Quand je regardais les sports à la télévision ou que je lisais le Timmins Daily Press ou le Toronto Star, c'était tout en anglais. Ce que je n'ai pas réalisé, c'est que j'avais commencé déjà la route à perdre mon langage, et, deux, à devenir assimilé; en d'autre mots, que je ne pensais plus en français.

Où j'ai eu vraiment la peur de ma vie, c'est qu'à un point—environ 1983, 1984, quelque chose comme ça—j'ai appliqué pour un poste bilingue avec la Fédération du travail de l'Ontario pour être coordinateur du programme BEST. BEST, c'était un programme d'alphabétisation et de seconde langue au milieu du travail. Moi, j'avais appliqué pour un poste comme coordinateur bilingue. Bien, j'ai fait mon entrevue, mais ceux qui ont fait l'entrevue ne parlaient pas deux gouttes de français, donc je l'ai passée très facilement. Ils m'ont engagé. C'est peut-être pour ça qu'ils m'ont engagé, parce qu'ils ne comprenaient pas. C'est toute une autre histoire. On peut faire des blagues.

Où j'ai vraiment eu peur : c'est la première fois que j'ai travaillé, comme francophone, en français et que j'ai été capable de m'exprimer en français avec mes collègues et ceux avec qui j'avais besoin de faire affaire dans le programme où je me trouvais. Je me rappelle la journée. J'étais à Hearst, et on connaît tous Hearst. Hearst est francophone. Dans mon comté, comme aussi à Ottawa, il y a beaucoup de monde qui peuvent faire toute leur vie en français, et jamais parler l'anglais, qui vont être bien corrects chez eux parce qu'ils sont majoritairement francophones. Mais ils vivent et ils choisissent de vivre en français. Et à Hearst, comme à Mattice et dans d'autres communautés, c'est exactement ça qu'ils ont fait.

Je me rappelle être chez—dans le temps c'était United Sawmill, appartenue par M. Fontaine, ancien député libéral de Cochrane-Nord. J'y ai été faire ma première présentation en français à United Sawmill, avec les patrons, les « boss » qui étaient là, comme on dit en bon français, et avec le syndicat pour expliquer le programme BEST. Je n'ai pas été capable de le faire. Je me rappelle

que j'ai commencé à bégayer. Je ne pouvais pas dire deux mots sans penser en anglais et faire une traduction vers le français, au point que cela m'a fait peur à la souche, dans le sens que je me suis rendu compte finalement que ce que mon père m'avait dit quand j'étais un p'tit gars m'était arrivé : que j'avais choisi de ne pas vivre en français. Avec cela, j'avais perdu jusqu'à un certain point ma langue. Le seul temps que je parlais français, c'était quand j'étais voir maman et papa, quand je parlais à mes grands-parents et quand je parlais à nos petites filles. Dans ce temps-là les petites filles étaient assez jeunes. Elles avaient peut-être cinq, six, sept ans. Quand tu parles à une petite fille ou à un petit garçon à la maison, ce ne sont pas de longues conversations avec des mots très développés. C'est plutôt, « Arrête ça. Va te coucher. Fais dodo. » Ce sont des phrases bien courtes.

Et ce qui est arrivé : ça m'a fait peur, et là je me suis rendu compte que, parce que je n'avais pas choisi de vivre en français, j'avais commencé à m'assimiler à la culture majoritairement anglophone, et ça m'a vraiment fait peur. Quelqu'un nommé Richard Hudon—certains vont reconnaître le nom—est vu comme militant dans la communauté francophone. Mais pour du monde comme moi dans le temps, il était très important de reprendre qui j'étais comme francophone, et il m'a fait réaliser que tu n'as pas besoin, même si tu travailles dans un milieu anglophone, de penser en anglais. Tu peux travailler comme électricien, ce que j'étais dans le temps, en français, et quand ça vient à raisonner les maths et la théorie et toutes les autres affaires qui sont importantes pour faire mon travail, quand je suis avec un collègue francophone, choisir de parler en français—pas parler seulement de l'anglais parce que tout le monde d'autre dans la mine parle anglais. Deux francophones vont se rencontrer dans la cage ou dans un « drift », comme on dit en bon français, puis ils vont se parler en anglais. C'est là où j'ai commencé à dire qu'il était important de m'exprimer en français et de commencer à vivre en français. Cela m'a pris longtemps. Aujourd'hui je me trouve 90%, 95% habile et capable de penser en français au même moment que je le parle. Mais même aujourd'hui, après toutes les années qui sont passées, 25 années, ce n'est pas toujours facile. Le point est que, à un certain point dans ma vie, j'avais commencé l'assimilation.

Et qu'est-ce que cela a à faire avec ce débat? Ce sont des institutions comme TFO, comme nos écoles, comme les centres de santé communautaire, comme toutes les autres institutions dans nos communautés qui choisissent et demandent, exigent, quils ne sont pas des organisations bilingues. C'est pour cela que je me sentais refroidi un peu quand le député conservateur a commencé à parler : « Bien, on comprend que c'est important, mais on peut peut-être fusionner l'administration parce que, après tout, ça n'a rien à faire avec les services qu'on donne à la clientèle. » Complètement faux. Si tu n'as pas une administration francophone, comment veux-tu que cette organisation-là va vivre en français et donner les services en français ? C'est quasiment impossible.

Je regarde les débats qu'on a eus et je veux remercier—dans le temps, c'était John Baird, le ministre responsable des services communautaires. Il y avait une refonte de la santé mentale, et on voulait fusionner le Canadian Mental Health Association, une association bilingue, avec l'association à Kapuskasing, qui était francophone. Jé suis allé voir John, et j'ai dit, « Fais pas ça. À la fin de la journée on aura une association à Kapuskasing-Hearst-Smooth Rock Falls, une association francophone qui vit en français non seulement dans l'administration mais dans les services donnés à la clientèle. M. Baird—on va lui donner le « credit »—a accepté et on a refusé le fusionnement de ces deux organisations.

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Moi, je peux vous prédire : si on aurait fusionné ces deux organisations, les services tels qu'on a présentement à Hearst, à Kap, a Smooth Rock Falls et les points entre ne seraient pas les mêmes qu'on a aujourd'hui. Oui, on aurait des services. Peut-être qu'on pourrait dire un « acte » de plus. Peut-être qu'il y aurait certaines affaires qui auraient pu arriver avec le Canadian Mental Health. Mais la question, c'est qu'avoir une administration francophone permet à l'organisation de vivre l'expérience de la communauté et de mieux la desservir, ce qui est important pour la communauté elle-même. Donc, quand on parle d'un fusionnement, quand on parle de la création de son propre acte qui donne l'autorité pour TFO, dans les années à venir, de toujours demeurer en français, c'est terriblement important.

Si on ne le met pas dans la législation, il va y avoir un temps où le gouvernement va arriver ici à l'Assemblée, et si c'est seulement un ordre du Conseil, du cabinet, qui dit qu'on donne l'autorité, que TFO est une organisation qui vit sa réalité en français avec l'administration et avec tous les services qu'elle donne, ça peut être changé tel que ça, et on n'aura rien à dire. Au moins, avec un acte, le gouvernement aurait besoin de venir ici proposer un acte, ce qui donne une chance à la communauté de se protéger et de s'organiser. Donc, je pense que c'est important pour cette raison-là.

L'autre affaire—je vais le dire vite—sur la question de TFO, c'est qu'on a un conseil d'administration de neuf personnes qui sont nommées. Moi, je pense qu'ils essaient de faire de leur mieux, mais on a besoin de toujours, toujours penser et réfléchir à qui on dessert dans la communauté provinciale pour s'assurer que les représentants des différentes parties de la province, qui représente aussi non seulement une région géographique mais aussi un aperçu peut-être un peu différent. Qu'on essaie de combler ces postes d'une manière par laquelle on peut avoir une bonne réflexion de la communauté francophone.

Ce n'est pas dire que je n'ai pas de confiance en l'administration présent, ou en le conseil d'administration. C'est juste pour dire qu'on a besoin de s'assurer, quand on remplace ce monde-là, qu'on dit, « C'est non seulement la représentation géographique, mais aussi l'aperçu que le monde peut amener de leur communauté. »

Par exemple, ici en Ontario il y a beaucoup de nouveaux Canadiens qui viennent non de la France, non de la Belgique. Ils sont francophones, mais ils viennent de l'Afrique. Eux autres, ils ont un aperçu comme francophones très différent que nous ici en Ontario, dont les ancêtres sont venus de la France. Eux autres ont eu une expérience différente en Afrique. C'étaient des pays qui ont été colonisés par les Français, qui ont trouvé leur indépendance, qui ont une culture très différente de la nôtre, même si on partage une langue, et qui viennent ici et choisissent de vivre en français en Ontario.

On a besoin de refléter sur TFO, par exemple, cette réalité et de dire, « Être francophone, ça ne veut pas dire que tu as besoin d'être francophone comme les Québécois ou les personnes du nord ou de l'est de l'Ontario, ou comme les Français de France. Être francophone, c'est être qui tu es, et peut-être que ta culture est un peu différente si tu viens d'une autre partie de la Terre."

C'est une affaire que je trouve intéressante : des fois, nous les francophones, on se donne un « disservice » à ce point. Par exemple, si on entend parler des anglophones de différentes parties de la Terre, on ne pense jamais à leur accent. Si un Écossais arrive avec un Anglais et nous parle ici en Ontario, on ne dit pas qu'il parle le méchant anglais parce qu'il a un accent écossais. Mais parfois, ce qui va arriver, c'est qu'il va y avoir des francophones avec des accents différents, et on les juge un peu différemment à cause de cet accent. Tout ce que je peux dire, c'est qu'on a besoin d'arrêter cette affaire. On a besoin de dire, « Si on veut s'assurer que le français demeure vif et qu'on épanouit le français, il faut accepter tout le monde dans notre famille et réaliser qu'on n'a pas tous exactement les mêmes points de vue, et que nos cultures et nos traditions peuvent être un peu différentes. Et vive la différence. »

On a besoin de refléter ça non seulement sur le conseil mais aussi dans notre programmation à TFO.

Je veux finir sur ce point. Je veux répéter ce que certains députés conservateurs ont dit, et ici ils ont parfaitement raison. TFO, c'est vraiment la seule instance où on puisse aller chercher tous les francophones et les regrouper ensemble pour leur donner de l'information. On a notre émission Panorama, qui est très importante. La plupart d'entre nous la regardent régulièrement, parce que c'est la manière dont on s'informe non seulement sur ce qui se passe comme francophones en Ontario, mais ce qui se passe en Ontario. On n'a pas besoin de donner juste des nouvelles francophones quand ça vient à ce qui se passe à travers les manchettes, on a besoin de parler de ce qui se passe.

Une des affaires que j'aimerais voir c'est qu'on ait un meilleur budget et d'être capable d'épanouir ces programme-là comme Panorama pour donner aux Ontariens francophones l'habilité d'aller rechercher les nouvelles chaque jour sur la chaîne TFO. On aurait au moins une habilité d'être capable de voir un aperçu ontarien.

Un problème que je vois : on regarde RDI et c'est excellent. Ils donnent une portion ontarienne jusqu'à un certain point mais c'est plus un aperçu de ce qui se passe au Québec. La réalité francophone en Ontario est très différente de la réalité québécoise envers la politique et envers beaucoup d'autres dossiers. C'est pour ça que je pense que c'est important d'être capable de rapporter ce qui se passe ici, non seulement à Queen's Park mais à travers la province, une émission qui pourrait bâtir sur le succès de Panorama et épanouir notre habilité comme francophones d'aller chercher ces informations.

Donc, je vous dis que les néo-démocrates vont supporter ce projet de loi. On regarde vers une journée où on pourra regarder des services même mieux qu'on a présentement à TFO pour s'assurer que la communauté francophone peut continuer à s'épanouir ici dans la province de l'Ontario.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Wow! Un projet de loi qui rend TFO un organisme permanent et indépendant.

Du côté des différentes communautés francophones en Ontario, ça faisait longtemps qu'on attendait ça. C'est sûre qu'au fil des années, on a vu que TFO a été capable d'augmenter sa programmation. De plus en plus, la programmation était pour et par les francophones. On a vu la création d'un conseil d'administration indépendant pour la composante francophone de la programmation. On a vu après ça des budgets qui se sont rattachés à ça pour permettre une programmation francophone typiquement franco-ontarienne.

Puis bien entendu, il y a quelques semaines de ça, on a fêté en grande pompe l'ouverture de ces nouveaux locaux ici, pas loin de Queen's Park. C'était une belle fête. Tu pouvais voir tout le monde qui était là. Tu pouvais voir la fierté. C'était un accomplissement qui avait pris tellement de temps, et tellement de gens y ont travaillé, et c'est finalement arrivé, c'était la fête et le gens de TFO y avaient mis le paquet. C'était bien organisé, on était bien reçu et on pouvait vraiment célébrer avec eux un pas important.

L'autre pas important sera certainement le projet de loi 55, de l'Office des télécommunications éducatives de langue française de l'Ontario, qui fera de TFO un organisme permanent et indépendant.

C'est important de féliciter M^me^ Gisèle Chrétien. M^me^ Gisèle Chrétien est sur le conseil d'administration de TFO depuis longtemps et elle en est la coprésidente. C'est une dame qui demeure dans mon comté, qui travaille fort pour assurer l'épanouissement de la communauté francophone. C'est une ancienne présidente du Collège Boréal, le premier collège de langue française dans le nord de l'Ontario. Cela m'apporte à l'importance de l'infrastructure pour le développement et l'épanouissement de la communauté francophone.

Certains d'entre vous vont se souvenir de la bataille qu'on a appelé S.O.S. Montfort. S.O.S. Montfort était une coalition de gens concertés qui voulaient sauvegarder l'Hôpital Montfort. Ils avaient retenu les services de M^e^ Caza, un avocat local d'Ottawa, là où est situé l'hôpital Montfort. M. Caza a été capable d'utiliser le préambule de la Loi 8, sur les services en français, qui démontre que la Loi 8 engage la province de l'Ontario à préserver et à faire l'épanouissement de la communauté francophone.

L'argument de base a été que, quand tu es Franco-Ontarien, à tou les jours de ta vie tu te lèves et tu prends la décision de ne pas te laisser assimiler. Parce que la route facile, comme mon collègue M. Bisson l'a dit, la est de prendre la route de l'assimilation. Si tu décides de vivre ta vie en français en Ontario, ça va te demander un effort constant. M[e] Caza a comparé ça un peu à—on est dans un beau grand lac et il fait chaud. Nous, les francophones, on nage, puis les anglophones, se promènent en bateau. De temps en temps tu deviens fatigué, puis tu aurais envie d'embarquer dans un bateau, toi aussi, mais si tu embarques dans le bateau, si tu te laisses assimiler, ça veut dire que tes enfants seront assimilés, eux aussi, et ilos vont vivre leur vie en anglais, et tous tes descendants vont vivre leur vie en anglais parce qu'il y a très peu d'anglophones qui font le saut vers la francophonie, mais il y a beaucoup de francophones qui font le saut vers l'anglais. Et une fois que tu fais ça, c'est non seulement pour toi, c'est pour tes enfants, c'est pour tous les descendants. Tu ne feras plus partie de la communauté francophone.

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Mais M[e] Caza était capable de développer l'argument que pour les francophones, il y a des petits fiords dans ce grand lac-là. Il y a des places où on peut aller se reposer pour pouvoir continuer à prendre la décision de continuer à nager. Puis ces fiords-là, c'est les infrastructures francophones, c'est les organismes qui appartiennent à la francophonie et qui permettent aux francophones de se reposer.

Bill 55, An Act to enact the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, will make TFO a permanent and independent organization. This is an act that the different francophone communities in Ontario have been waiting for for a long time.

Through the years, we have seen TFO develop its own programming, then have their own board of directors that looked over the programming. They got their own budget and, a few weeks ago, celebrated their new location in downtown Toronto, not far away from Queen's Park. But with this bill, they will be a permanent and independent organization. They will be part of the francophone infrastructure of Ontario.

Why is this important? Well, some of you will remember SOS Montfort. That was a huge grassroots organization that helped save the Montfort Hospital. What Montfort did was hire the services of lawyer Mr. Caza. At the basis of his argument was that in Ontario, Franco-Ontarians, every morning, have to make the decision to remain Franco-Ontarian. It is a lot easier to go with the majority. As my colleague Gilles Bisson has mentioned, it is a lot easier to just go with the language of the majority and speak English all the time. Mr. Caza showed that Ontario is like a big lake: It's nice and warm, and people have a choice.

Every morning, you can decide to swim in the lake—and that would be that you decide to remain Franco-Ontarian—or you can hop in a boat. The anglophones go in boats. If you don't feel like swimming anymore, you hop in a boat. The problem with hopping in a boat is that, if you decide to not use your French every day, you will quickly become assimilated, your children will be assimilated and the rest of the children after them will also be. You would have lost; you won't be Franco-Ontarian anymore. But he also showed that for Franco-Ontarians to maintain their language and be able to thrive, they needed little islands where they could rest. Those islands were francophone institutions. By making TFO a permanent and independent organization, we are creating one of those islands where Franco-Ontarians can go and rest.

When I talk about how important it is to have infrastructure: C'est très important pour les Franco-Ontariens d'avoir leur infrastructure francophone. Quand on parle d'infrastructure francophone, c'est sûr qu'on est en train de créer TFO. Si, celui dont on parle aujourd'hui, c'est important. Mais il y en a d'autres qui existent. On parle des d'écoles francophones, que ce soit les écoles primaires et secondaires. On est très fier également de nos collèges francophones, qu'on parle de la Cité Collégiale à Ottawa ou du Collège Boréal et ses multiples campus. Il y a les églises francophones qui sont là. Il y a également les centres de santé communautaire francophones. On a les centres pour personnes âgées, et dans un certain rapport les caisses populaires, qui s'efforcent aussi d'offrir les services en français.

Quand on parle d'infrastructure, on parle vraiment d'organismes francophones qui ont, à la base, un conseil d'administration francophone. Donc, les réunions du conseil se font en français, les gens qui siègent choisissent de venir et parler français et, la plupart du temps, la chartre est également écrite en français. On va trouver quelque chose là-dedans qui dit que c'est pour et par les francophones. La langue de travail d'un organisme, une infrastructure francophone, sera également le français.

Je vais vous donner des exemples de pourquoi c'est important. Les politiques des ressources humaines dans les organismes francophones, ça sera également en français. Si les employés sont syndiqués, la convention collective sera écrite en français.

Qu'est-ce que ça fait pour le Franco-Ontarien ou la Franco-Ontarienne qui hésite, qui est insécure?, Le député Bisson nous a donné son exemple où, il s'est toujours considéré francophone. Mais à force de parler l'anglais tout le temps, à un moment donné, ton français commence à être un peu moins sécure. Moins tu te sens confortable en français, moins tu as de raisons de l'utiliser et plus tu le perds.

Dans un organisme francophone, j'étais directrice générale d'un centre de santé communautaire francophone pendant 11 ans. Souvent je voyais des gens qui avaient été éduqués en français, qui parlaient français, mais qui travaillaient dans des hôpitaux depuis 10 ou 15 ans. Les dossiers sont en anglais. La langue de travail est en anglais. Le conseil d'administration, tout se passe en anglais. Cette personne-là va beau parler français. Si tu passes 40 heures de ta vie à travailler en anglais, à un moment donné c'est l'anglais qui sort. C'est l'anglais avec lequel on était le plus confortable.

Ces gens-là faisaient application pour venir au centre de santé communautaire parce que, dans le fond d'eux autres ils savaient qu'ils voulaient revenir au français. Puis souvent pendant l'entrevue, c'est plus ou moins bon. Il y a de la misère; le vocabulaire ne vient pas parce que c'est peu naturel. Ces gens-là, quand on les engage, quand on leur donne la chance de travailler dans un milieu francophone—l'épanouissement se fait très, très rapidement. Ils sont fiers. Ils mettent le temps, les efforts et l'énergie pour avoir du succès. Ça, veut dire que non seulement eux autres ont gardé leur français, mais aussi pour leurs petits enfants, pour leurs descendants, on vient de faire un pas. Çest les îlots que M^e^ Caza avait expliqué, que si on veut l'épanouissement de la communauté francophone, il nous faut des infrastructures pour la communauté francophone. M^e^ Caza a pu le démontrer, et dans la vraie vie, comme l'exemple que je viens de vous donner, ça marche. Ça marche a 100%, donnant à la communauté francophone des institutions francophones, et vous allez voir que l'épanouissement va se faire.

I was talking about why it is important to have francophone institutions. Right now, with Bill 55 we are creating an independent, permanent francophone infrastructure with TFO. TFO is a big one, and this is the one we're talking about today, but there are others. I'll give you examples of the primary and secondary schools in the French language, whether in the public board or the Catholic board. We have the two French colleges, La Cité collégiale and Collège Boréal in the north, with all of its campuses. There are French churches, French community health centres, French elderly person centres, and, to a certain extent, caisses populaires target the francophone population.

When we talk about francophone infrastructure, what we mean is that the board of directors hold their meetings in French. Their statutes are written in French and often target the francophone population. The language at work is French, so that when people come to work, we expect them, between themselves, naturally to be speaking French. The human resources policies are written in French, so that if people want to know about their holiday pay or whatever, this is available to them in French. If it is a unionized work environment, then the collective agreement will be written in French.

What those francophone institutions, as I call them, do is what Maître Caza was describing. They create safe islands for francophones to protect their language and develop.

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I'll give you an example. I was the executive director of the francophone community health centre in Sudbury for 11 years. Often, when we would do interviews, we would get people, like my member Mr. Bisson said, who felt that they were francophone but they hadn't spoken French at work in 10, 12, 15 years. Most of the workers came from hospital settings. The hospitals chart in English; the language at work is English; the relationship with management and human resources is in English; the collective agreement is in English. Yes, they had spoken French to some of their clients who were francophone, but really, their life at work was in English. If you've lived through 10, 15 years of this, and all of a sudden you come to a job where we interview you in French, it's often shaky. But those people would get the job because they were qualified in their French. Within months, they would regain that confidence. That means that not only would they be proud and able Franco-Ontarians; that would also mean a difference for their children and their children's children.

Those are the islands that Mr. Caza was describing. This is a place where francophones can rest, it is easy, you don't have to put in an effort because it is all around you. Those are important, and this is what we're creating with TFO.

Dans mon comté, environ 40 % de la population sait parler français, et 28 % parle le français à la maison.

Dans le projet de loi 55, le gouvernement a mandaté que l'Office—on parle ici de l'Office des télécommunications éducatives de langue française de l'Ontario. Nous, habituellement, on l'appelle TFO, mais c'est son vrai nom. « L'Office a son siège sociale dans la cité de Toronto. » C'est mandaté. On y dit également que « L'Office ne doit pas créer de filiales si ce n'est avec l'approbation du lieutenant-gouverneur en conseil » et que « L'Office nomme les conseils régionaux et les comités consultatifs qu'il estime nécessaires ».

Pour nous, c'est sûr que l'on veut dans un premier temps le comité consultatif pour le nord, la région de Cornwall, et les régions de Timmins, Sudbury et d'autres régions où il y a de fortes concentrations de francophones, mais on aimerait également que TFO puisse y avoir des filiales pour ainsi faciliter un contenu plus régional et local pour que lorsque les Franco-Sudburiens et les Franco-Timminois—je pense qu'on les appelle ça, les francophones de Timmins—regardent la TFO, bien qu'on ne voit pas seulement que la francophonie de Toronto, mais qu'on y voit également la francophonie de Cornwall, puis de Hawkesbury, puis de Sudbury, puis de Timmins, puis de Welland et des autres parties de l'Ontario où on retrouve une grosse concentration de francophones. Ça, c'est un peur regrettable et certainement quelque chose que l'on aimerait voir améliorer.

In my riding, about 40% of the residents speak both English and French, and 28% speak French at home.

Bill 55, the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act—what we usually call TFO—says, "The head office of the authority"—talking about TFO—"shall be in the city of Toronto."

It goes on to say, "The authority"—here again, that's what we call TFO in this bill—"shall not establish a subsidiary except with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council."

Paragraph 8 goes on to say, "The authority shall appoint such regional councils and such advisory committees as it considers necessary to advise it in developing the policy and operations of the authority."

So, in a sense, we are satisfied that the authority can put an advisory committee in place, but we would

certainly like to see full-fledged subsidiaries of TFO in areas of the province that have, like my riding, very high concentrations of francophones. It would be very good for the Franco-Ontarian people: francophones from Sudbury, from Timmins, Cornwall, Hawkesbury, down in and around Welland, Penetang—everywhere you have a concentration of francophones—to be able to see themselves on TFO, that the programming is not solely based out of Toronto but some of the programming really brings out some of the interesting features of the rest of the francophones in Ontario. So this is part of the bill where we would really like to see a bit of enhancement.

J'aimerais également vous parler de la diminution du financement en langue française en Ontario. Puis, je ne peux pas m'empêcher de faire référence à quelque chose qui s'est passé il y a bien, bien longtemps, peu de temps après le tournant du siècle, en fait, au début des années 1900 avec le Règlement 17.

Pour ceux qui ne connaissent pas eur histoire franco-ontarienne en détail, le Règlement 17 c'était le règlement qui interdisait l'enseignement du français en Ontario. C'était une politique d'assimilation où est-ce qu'on voulait assimiler les francophones en Ontario, puis la meilleure façon de les faire disparaître c'était d'empêcher l'enseignement du français. Comme ça, tout le monde deviendrait anglophone. Ça c'était le Règlement 17. Le Règlement 17 a eu des effets dévastateurs sur le communauté francophone.

On connait l'importance de l'éducation comme déterminant de la santé. Le Règlement 17 lui-même a eu un effet dévastateur sur le niveau de santé de la population francophone.

Quand on regarde l'étude sur la santé des francophones en Ontario, une étude qui a été parrainée par le Service de santé public de Sudbury mais pour toutes les régions de la province, on s'aperçoit vite de l'effet dévastateur du Règlement 17. Le règlement qui empêchait l'enseignement du français en Ontario. Les francophones fument plus, font moins d'exercice, ont plus de problèmes avec l'obésité. On y retrouve plus de diabète, plus de maladies cardiovasculaires, plus de maladies chroniques moins bien contrôlées, moins de visites chez le dentiste, moins d'accès aux services de santé mentale, et la liste continue—très longue. Le rapport était fait comme ça.

C'est sûr qu'en ce moment on est content d'avoir les conseils scolaires francophones, que ce soit le conseil public ou le conseil catholique, mais ce dont on a besoin également c'est une formule de financement équitable qui reconnaît les besoins spécifiques des francophones en matière d'éducation. C'est pas suffisant d'avoir un conseil scolaire et d'avoir une école francophone. Il faut également qu'elle soit financée en rapport avec ces besoins. Et ça, ça touche directement le financement de TFO.

I wanted to talk a bit about the decrease in the resources allocated to French-language education in Ontario. Whenever I talk about French-language education, I like to talk about regulation 17. For some of you who don't know your Franco-Ontarian history as well as you should, regulation 17 was the bill that made teaching in French illegal. It was a bill that was put in place for assimilation. If the francophone population was not allowed to be educated in their own language anymore, they would become assimilated and everybody in Ontario would become English-speaking.

Back then, it sounded like a good idea; it certainly wasn't. Regulation 17 had a devastating effect on Franco-Ontarians. A lot of them could not go to school. I would say that the sharpest kids in the bunch were able to do the switch from francophone education to anglophone education, but most couldn't and basically ended up not going to school.

Education is a key determinant of health. The fact that francophones did not have access to education in their own language had a devastating effect on the health of the francophone population. We've had two health status reports on the Franco-Ontarian community in Ontario, and those reports are a case study as to the effect of education on the determinants of health. We can see that more of the francophone population smokes; we have a problem with obesity; more of us struggle with chronic illnesses and high blood pressure; we have more accidents; fewer Franco-Ontarians access dental services or mental health services; and the list goes on and on.

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I talk about this because it was very good to create a francophone school board, whether it be public or Catholic, but if we don't fund those school boards in a way that allows them to meet the needs of the francophone community, then we've kind of missed the boat.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I forgot to tell you that.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Well, well. Mon collègue me donne des petites notes. Vous allez m'excuser.

M. Gilles Bisson : C'est de l'encouragement, Madame Gélinas; c'est seulement de l'encouragement.

M^me^ France Gélinas : Mon collègue me donne de l'encouragement; c'est ça.

En terminant, j'aimerais souligner deux événements qui se passent et encore là qui sont liés à TFO et à la francophonie en Ontario. Le premier c'est le Salon du livre qui aura lieu à Sudbury en de fin de semaine. En fait, ça commence jeudi. Le Salon du livre a lieu à tous les deux ans. Il y a des dizaines de milliers de personnes qui viennent à Sudbury pour participer au Salon du livre. Il y a toutes sortes d'événements créatifs. Je me souviens l'année dernière de l'autobus de la poésie. Je vous invite d'ailleurs à un 5 à 7 avec le poète Sudburien, M. Michel Dallaire, qui présentera un de ses nouveaux livres. On a des spectacles pour la population francophone, dont M. Zachary Richard qui sera à Sudbury dimanche soir, en collaboration avec la Slague et le carrefour francophone. On fera probablement le lancement de notre nouvelle librairie francophone à Sudbury. Et le Collège Boréal en profite pour faire les états généraux de la francophonie à Sudbury.

C'est sûr qu'il en reste encore beaucoup à faire. On peut penser au service juridique. La clinique juridique de Sudbury est présentement en grève. Je vous encourage, mesdames et le monsieur, tenez courage; on est derrière

vous. La clinique juridique est présentement en grève et l'aide juridique à Sudbury, ce sont des organismes bilingues. La communauté francophone serait mieux desservie avec une aide juridique et une clinique juridique francophone pour mieux rencontrer les besoins de la communauté francophone.

Mais pour l'instant, la mise en place permanente et indépendante de TFO est quelque chose de bien, et quelque chose que nous, les néo-démocrates, on va appuyer. Je vous remercie. Du côté des néo-démocrates, nous allons appuyer ce projet de loi.

M. Shafiq Qaadri: L'éducation et la culture françaises sont un des volets majeurs de la vision globale de notre gouvernement. Elles sont un des caractéristiques qui définissent l'Ontario, et font un modèle pour le monde entier. Alors que nous célébrons le 10e anniversaire de la création des conseils scolaires francophones, il est important que nous continuions à soutenir l'éducation en français.

Nous sommes fiers des réalisations des élèves d'expression française. Ils ont beaucoup travaillé pour assurer leur réussite scolaire. Leurs parents se sont attachés à les soutenir. Et il en a été de même des éducatrices et éducateurs et du personnel de soutien dans les écoles français.

En tant que gouvernement, nous avons fait un effort concerté pour veiller à ce que les élèves de langue française disposent des ressources voulues en salle de classe et chez eux. Nous devons encore, cela va sans dire, relever des défis tant qu'aujourd'hui que demain. Cependant, si les progrès accomplis au cours des 10 dernières années sont une indication, j'estime que les élèves francophones de l'Ontario ont un avenir plus radieux devant eux.

Je pense que tant que nous leur permettons d'avoir accès à des opportunités, à des ressources adaptées à leur besoins,ils les saisiront et relèveront les défis.

On behalf of the government and the McGuinty vision, and indeed all members of this caucus, and without a doubt all members of this Legislature, it's important for us to foster this precious resource of heritage, of diversity, of pluralism, specifically embodied here in the language and the culture and the heritage that is French. I'm very proud, therefore, to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I have no problem with the creation of yet another government agency or organ or board, or whatever it is, but I do have trouble with the fact that when I try to get help for some kids in my area who have autism, I can't get money for treatment. I haven't heard any debate over the cost of doing these kinds of things. I haven't heard any debate over the cost of the present TVO. I think if we have TVO in English, we should have it in French. Perhaps there's even a better argument for having one in French, rather than one in English.

Notwithstanding that, nobody talks about costs. We're not providing the basic services for our kids to get the help they need. I talk about one specific constituent of mine. I guess my preference at this point in time is that until my constituent kids can get the proper help for their problems, I would rather not have TVO at all. I think their need is greater. I think their need is prior to this need. Nobody seems to talk about costs when we create new government institutions.

I can't argue that there shouldn't be TVO for the francophones in our province because, as I say, I think they're in a more difficult position to maintain their culture than the English people are. But if we're going to do this, we should know what it costs—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde : En tout premier lieu, j'aimerais féliciter madame la ministre Meilleur, déléguée aux Affaires francophones, pour avoir introduit ce projet de loi qui répond aux besoins de la communauté francophone.

Ce projet de loi-là est très important pour la communauté francophone, mais aussi pour tous les jeunes qui sont inscrits à des programmes d'immersion dans nos écoles. Nous savons qu'en Ontario, nous avons plus de 550 000 francophones, plus de un million de personnes qui sont considérées francophiles, mais des milliers de jeunes veulent poursuivre leurs études en français et en anglais afin d'avoir une meilleure opportunité pour trouver un emploi. Des milliers de personnes, de jeunes, dans nos écoles en Ontario sont inscrits dans des programmes d'immersion.

J'assistais tout récemment à une réunion dans la région de Toronto. On nous disait qu'il manquait de personnel pour enseigner des cours en français dans nos écoles anglophones. Cela démontre qu'aujourd'hui les jeunes, lorsqu'ils reviennent de l'école après avoir suivi quelques heures dans les cours d'immersion, veulent s'améliorer, veulent écouter des programmes en français, et puis TFO est tellement reconnue pour ses programmes éducationnelles. Donc, nos jeunes reviennent à la maison, les parents ne parlent parfois aucunement le français, mais la seule façon de à développer davantage leurs connaissances, c'est en regardant les programmes à la télévision de TFO.

Donc, je crois que c'est très, très important pour notre jeunesse et pour nos aînés qui, dans l'est de l'Ontario, ont beaucoup de difficulté d'avoir des nouvelles de l'Ontario. TFO est là et, avec l'administration, le pouvoir qu'on va leur donner. Maintenant, nos aînés vont pouvoir poursuivre, et connaître aussi—les francophones vont connaître—des besoins de la communauté francophone.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? There being none: Response.

Mme France Gélinas: I think I was a little bit fast standing up, there. Sorry about that.

First, to the member for Etobicoke North.

J'imagine, puisque vous sembliez être en accord avec ce qu'on avait présenté, que vous êtes également en accord qu'on aurait besoin de regarder dans le court terme à l'expansion de TFO pour leur permettre d'avoir des bureaux satellites permanents—puis là je vais vous prêcher pour ma paroisse un petit peu—certainement à

Sudbury, dans le bout de Cornwall, à Timmins et dans le sud de la province, et j'espère que vos mots d'encouragement incluaient ça également.

For the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, I've been working in French in Ontario for a while. The arguments that there are other pressures and priorities could apply to any endeavour in the French language. At the end of the day, you either make the decision to invest in and support the Franco-Ontarian community, like Bill 8 suggests, or you don't. When you make the decision to support, that will mean that it becomes a priority. That means that some resources have to be allocated to that—hopefully, not to the detriment of IBI therapy for those kids.

Pour le membre de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, c'est sûr que nous aussi on reconnaît qu'il y a un demi-million de francophones en Ontario et qu'il y a un demi-million de francophiles en Ontario. L'investissement que le projet de loi 55 fait avec TFO va profiter à tous ces gens-là, mais il va vraiment profiter à tous les Ontariens.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

M. Mike Colle: Je propose l'ajournement du débat.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Colle has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried

Second reading debate adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Mr. Speaker, we have an agreement here to move adjournment of the House.

Je propose l'ajournement de la Chambre.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House is adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1622.

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Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
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L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 6 May 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 6 mai 2008

The House met at 0900.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS

Mr. Bryant, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 44, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 44, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Pickering–Scarborough East.

It's a pleasure to be here to speak to this bill, obviously part of our supply process, part of our appropriations process. It allows, among other things, for this House to scrutinize the financials of the government of the day. It's the means by which our government in fact is held to account, not only in the Legislature but through committee processes and otherwise. It's the means by which, among other things, the public has an opportunity, through the media and otherwise, to assess and probe and test how the taxpayers' money is spent.

I do want to share my time with the great member from Pickering, and I'm going to do that right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It's Pickering–Scarborough East now. With all of the boundary changes that occur, the ridings keep shifting, and I now have the pleasure of representing both areas in Durham and areas within the city of Toronto.

It's a pleasure to be able to rise today on third reading of the Ontario budget bill to speak about the initiatives that will make Ontario yet a better place to live, to work and to do business. Let me say it's so nice to be here bright and early on this Tuesday morning, starting the debate at a time that reflects on the business hours that most people are familiar with—although, as has been said here, we're all often busy at this time of the morning regardless of when debate begins.

Ontario's economy has continued to grow even in the face of rather significant challenges, despite an external environment that includes weakened US growth in their economy, higher oil prices and a much stronger Canadian dollar. The government, though, has been prudent with the province's finances and will continue to exercise caution while remaining optimistic and positive about the economy of this province. We're on track to produce six balanced budgets, while investing in this province to build a better future for all Ontarians.

We have said before that our government has the right plan to lead this province both in good times and times that are more challenging. Our plan balances prudent financial management with vital investments that build on the strengths of this province. We're investing in health care in a very substantive way, in public education and the environment, because these foundations make Ontario a better place to live. The government is investing in people and in our communities to improve the quality of life for all Ontarians, including families and our most vulnerable citizens. There isn't one simple answer to attract growth and investment to this province. We recognize that the people of Ontario, though, are our greatest strength in the long term. Giving people the tools and opportunities to succeed will help with our future prosperity.

The McGuinty government is making major investments in Ontario's infrastructure that will build stronger communities, improve the quality of life and attract new business investment to Ontario. Our infrastructure initiatives will create jobs and a more productive, competitive and green economy. This budget includes $1 billion in new funding for municipal infrastructure in this budget year. Municipal roads and bridges are the backbone of Ontario's transportation networks. They connect communities and provide access to economic opportunities. This year, the McGuinty government is investing some $400 million for municipal roads and bridges to help communities outside of the city of Toronto. They're investing $150 million in the municipal infrastructure investment initiative, the MIII, building on the $300 million already committed in 2007 for municipality priority infrastructure projects, including those very same roads and bridges. Some $16 million is being invested for 35 different projects to help municipalities invest in local roadways designated as connecting links.

Our government recognizes that, just as investing in our roads and bridges is important, investing in public

transportation is equally important. A fast, effective public transportation system is vital to the future prosperity of this great province. Expanded public transit will reduce traffic congestion and improve the quality of the air that we all breathe. So we have expanded our investment and targeted priority projects, which include some $497 million for public transit in the greater Toronto area and Hamilton, and $314 million this year to municipalities in gas tax revenues for public transit. Speaker, you and others will recall our commitment in 2003 to invest two cents per litre of the gas tax in municipal transit. That initiative was delivered early on and is paying dividends throughout Ontario. We're investing $382 million in 2008-09 to improve GO Transit, including investments in Union Station, really a symbol, a hub of activity for public transit in this province. We're replacing and renewing GO Transit's equipment. We're investing some $166 million over the next five years to expand GO Transit's bus rapid transit system to augment the existing rail and bus transit systems.

Just as it is important to move people easily around the province, we have to move goods swiftly and efficiently. International trade is an integral part of Ontario's and Canada's economic prosperity. The McGuinty government is committed to ensuring efficient and uninterrupted trade with the United States, our greatest trading partner, through Ontario's borders, its gateways and its trade corridors. That's why the Windsor gateway and border crossing will be a pre-eminent example of these levels of co-operation. To further improve the flow of goods around Ontario, we're improving our highways throughout the province. The budget has earmarked some $448 million in new funding over the next five years to accelerate projects to rehabilitate bridges that are part of the provincial highway network. One only needs to take a look at the 401 east from Oshawa through to Cobourg to see the type of work that's going on in many areas of this great province.

0910

The government is also making progress on commitments including the ReNew Ontario plan, with overall investments of $927 million in this budget year in the southern Ontario highways program and $557 million in the northern Ontario highways program. So investments are being made, not only in the south part of the province where the population is more dense, but in the northern part of the province where the demands are just as great, if not greater, for improved highway access.

As you know, our three-year, $1.5-billion skills-to-jobs action plan was a major component of this particular budget. Ontario's skilled and highly educated workforce is a key economic advantage of Ontario and will continue to be so, when the economy is at its most robust, or when it faces challenging times. Our investments will position Ontario as a destination of choice for global investment.

Many high-growth industries, such as information technology, construction, energy or health care, face a shortage of people with the right skills in place. The challenge is to ensure that workers with the right skills are available when growing industries actually need them, while also giving unemployed workers the retraining opportunities they need to get good jobs in expanding areas of the economy. The government's new skills training program will give Ontario's workforce the knowledge, the skills, the innovation and flexibility to compete with the world's best. Our new second-career strategy will help some 20,000 unemployed workers who have to commit to a long-term training plan to make the transition to new careers in growing areas of the economy.

We'll further expand the number of apprentices. The goal is to reach some 32,500 apprentices annually, an increase of another 25% by the 2011-12 budget year. The apprenticeship enhancement fund will help buy state-of-the-art equipment essential for technical training.

Our strategy involves investing in our students and post-secondary institutions so they can remain competitive well into the future. I've estimated that 70% of new jobs in the next decade will require post-secondary education. That's up a further 10% from just 10 years ago. It's indicative of why we need to have a strong post-secondary education system available to young people and those who are retraining or continue training in the workforce.

We also understand the importance of attracting students from around the world. We want to build upon the cultural and intellectual mosaic that is Ontario, that's reflected right here in this assembly. So the government is investing more than $7 million over three years for an international Ontario strategy to attract talented post-secondary students from around the world, raising the level of research excellence in Ontario's universities and contributing to our economic prosperity. We're also creating what's being called Global Edge, a program that facilitates international work and learning opportunities for enterprising post-secondary students, so that Ontario students have the chance to study abroad, to share the Ontario experience with the world.

Ontario's competitive strengths attract business investment and create jobs. So we're recognizing those areas that strengthen our economy and give our province an edge in that global marketplace. The McGuinty government is also investing in key sectors and making the tax system more competitive to promote investment and encourage economic growth.

Ontario's entertainment and creative cluster is a cornerstone of the province's new innovative economy. So we're providing $4 million over the next four years to support international marketing initiatives and increase the profile of Ontario's artists and cultural industries.

The government is also supporting tourism in Ontario with new investments. We're investing some $8 million over the next two years to conduct research on new tourism markets and determine the steps necessary to increase visits to Ontario and visits within Ontario.

The McGuinty government is continuing its support for the successful festival and events attraction and support program. We've heard about those in members' statements and in communities throughout Ontario,

where we're providing support. I've had the pleasure over the last few years to attend the Durham highland games, which has been the beneficiary of those types of funding programs.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Did you wear a kilt?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I didn't wear a kilt on that particular occasion, but the organizers certainly did.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Excellent.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Just as we're helping other industries to modernize, the government must do its part to modernize itself. Ontario's goal would be to lead all Canadian jurisdictions in efforts to measure and reduce the regulatory burden that business faces. The government's regulatory modernization will start with an aggressive cap-and-trade initiative for government regulation so that when new regulations are enacted, others must be eliminated.

We'll also create a new independent agency, Investment Ontario Inc., to respond to intensifying global competition for new business investments and jobs. This will help the government become more strategic in targeting markets and sectors on which to focus investment and trade activities, and improving Ontario's international recognition.

We're on track to produce six consecutive balanced budgets, and our accumulated deficit-to-GDP ratio is forecast to improve to 16.2% by 2010-11 from over 25% in 2003-04. The McGuinty government is paying down debt, we're balancing budgets and we're investing in Ontario to build a better future for all Ontarians. That really does need to be repeated: We're investing in Ontario, we're balancing the budget and we're paying down the debt to build a better future in Ontario.

We have the right plan to lead this province in good times and in times that are more challenging. Our plan balances prudent financial management with vital investments that build on the strengths of this great province, because we know that there isn't one simple answer to attract growth and investment in Ontario. It takes a comprehensive approach. Our quality of life is affected by a great variety of things and the people of this province agree with the approach that we're taking.

The government has invested and continues to invest in tax cuts for businesses. However, simply lowering taxes is not enough to ensure that an economy can compete in global markets. According to a recent 2006 competitiveness study by KPMG, the combined total of all taxes imposed by all levels of government represents only 3% to 13% of location-sensitive costs. As KPMG notes, selecting the best site for a business operation requires balanced consideration of many factors, including business costs, business environment, personnel costs and quality-of-life issues.

That's why our government has created a five-point plan that factors in all of these considerations, a plan that will attract investment and help grow the Ontario economy. The plan includes investments in skills and knowledge and speaks to our $1.5-billion investment in the skills-to-jobs action plan in this budget. It accelerates investments in infrastructure, and that speaks to the hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in our road and bridge systems. It supports innovation. It lowers business costs. Those in northern Ontario this year will be a benefactor as we accelerate the reduction of the business education tax for northern Ontario. It strengthens key partnerships to maximize our future potential.

Attracting business investment now and into the future requires an environment that supports business and people in all areas of their lives. We must continue to build on our strengths, because businesses are run by people and the citizens of this province want to live in a modern, well-run, competitive province. They want solid infrastructure, they want good public health care and they certainly want excellent education. Ontarians want a government that supports business and supports people.

We believe the key to success is in building on the strengths of this province and supporting an environment where new expertise can grow. In fact, just a few short months ago, we proposed a package of business tax relief worth $1.1 billion over three years and, in this budget, a further $750 million in business tax relief starting in 2007-08. We're proposing to eliminate the capital tax retroactive to January 1, 2007, for manufacturers and the resource industries. It's a clear reflection on the challenges that these sectors are facing. This would entitle those sectors to an additional $190 million in tax rebates for the period from January 2007 forward.

0920

The government proposes to extend the acceleration of the capital cost allowance rate for manufacturing and process manufacturing and equipment investments made before 2012. This will save businesses some $433 million over three years and encourage Ontario manufacturers and forestry companies to invest in new equipment.

To help modernize northern businesses, as I mentioned, the business education tax cuts will be accelerated and this will create a savings of some $70 million over the next three years for small business in northern Ontario.

The McGuinty government recognizes that supporting key sectors in the economy will encourage growth and innovation. To encourage innovation, we're proposing a 10-year Ontario income tax exemption for new corporations that commercialize intellectual property developed by qualifying universities, colleges or research institutes. This is a unique tax measure. Our income tax exemption would help educational and research institutes to create meaningful public-private partnerships. Small and medium-sized firms in Ontario employ over 60% of private sector employees. We want to continue to support an environment where they can flourish and grow Ontario's economy.

With only a couple of minutes left, I have much more that I would like to be able to say this morning, but in the interests of ensuring that all parties have an opportunity for the full debate that they would like: With this budget the government is reaffirming its support for all of Ontario. We're moving forward with the strategy that builds

on Ontario's strengths. The government is investing in those sectors, communities and families not currently sharing in Ontario's prosperity.

This budget package moves forward on the government's five-point plan for economic competitiveness. It's a plan for now that will build a better Ontario for the future. It's about investing in today to strengthen our position in the global marketplace tomorrow, a long-term strategy for Ontario's success. Our government takes immediate action when it's needed and builds on our skills. We are leading this province through some difficult times. The budget will further enhance the province's tax competitiveness and build on the areas that make Ontario a success. The McGuinty government is providing immediate strategic investments and tax measures to stimulate economic growth. We're investing in the building blocks of tomorrow. We're investing in innovation, in infrastructure, and we're investing in skills development. In the foundations of our economy today, we're investing in manufacturing, in the forestry sector, in agriculture and in tourism.

Our budget provides a solid economic package that starts right now, when it's most needed. I would encourage all of those in this House, when the time comes, to stand and show their support for Ontarians, the people, the communities and the businesses that make this is a great province, and to support the budget of 2008-09.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Pickering–Scarborough East, who is the parliamentary assistant to the minister. He had no content, technically. With about 40 minutes left to speak, he said he had no time to speak. In fact, he really should have said he had nothing to say.

I'm very surprised, quite honestly, when I look at this. This government has been here since 2003. They've increased spending by some 44%. I ask my constituency regularly, is it any better? With the largest tax increase in history as part of their record, the health tax, is it any better? Do we have problems in the emergency room? Do we have problems in long-term care for our seniors, our frail elderly? Do we find communities that still can't find doctors? With the increased spending, you would think you would find better outcomes, but in fact it's not the case.

The treachery of this discussion is really more profound when you look at the issues that they put in the budget which we would support. I call them poison-pill mechanisms. They're token amounts of recognition for relief for hard-working Ontarians. In the form of tax cuts for seniors, that's a worthy thing. It's certainly not enough relief for seniors. What it is, is giving them back their health tax money.

When you look at the implications of the 10 years tax-free for new, innovative companies in R&D, commercialization—most companies fail in the first three years, the majority of them. We will not see any of that money, that commitment, spent. I put on the record—the next election is 2011—none of those companies will be commercialized and have income that will taxable in any case. Even the tax relief for the business education tax is only for northern Ontario. So these are half measures. There's no strategic plan here. When you have 200,000-plus people out of jobs in the forestry sector, the manufacturing sector and even the IT sector and the agricultural sector, I'm concerned about the lack of vision, the lack of commitment for the longer term for the people of Ontario.

I can't support this budget, and I know our party is concerned that there are no decisions that affect the ordinary working people in this province, except more spending and more taxes.

Mr. Paul Miller: Obviously, I concur with the former speaker. This budget doesn't meet our needs in this province. It just touches on some of the more important things. You're talking $1 billion for infrastructure when we're about $60 billion short. I'm not sure if that would even take care of Hamilton's needs, one city in this great province.

Where is this 2008 budget? What's amazing about the Liberals' 2008 budget is that most of the spending announced has already been done. Budgets are supposed to be forward-looking documents to give citizens a sense of direction the government is taking. Budget 2008 made countless re-announcements of decisions presented in December's fall economic statement. Bill 44, the omnibus budget bill, contains, word for word, the proposal presented in Bill 24, the fall economic statement legislation. For example, the government announces over and over its decision to accelerate the capital tax reduction and tax changes for small businesses. What is clear from these re-announcements is a lack of a plan, no plan for a troubled economy, and disappearing manufacturing jobs—no plan to bring people out of poverty and no plan for an ever-worsening environment.

Speaking from the perspective in Hamilton, there are no new companies opening in Hamilton; there are no jobs coming to Hamilton. In the last 15 years, we've lost almost 20,000 manufacturing jobs, and as of just yesterday, National Steel Car is now having more layoffs—100—and they're talking about moving to Alabama. So I'm not quite sure where this government is headed with these so-called jobs, and I'm not sure where the jobs are happening, because it sure isn't happening in my part of the province.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to offer a couple of minutes of comment on budget Bill 44. I listened intently to the comments of the member from Durham, who talks often in his comments about the largest tax increase. I always feel the need to remind him about the incredible tax shift that occurred under the eight years or so of the reign of the Mike Harris-Ernie Eves governments in the province of Ontario. Like many other members who sit in this Legislature, I was a municipal councillor—in Thunder Bay—at the time that that exercise was unfolding, and am fully and acutely aware of the impact that had on our municipal budgets, as it did on the municipal budgets of many members around this Legislature. Not only was it downloading of social services, but they like to not

remind people about the downloading of infrastructure costs. I have a wonderful little example from Timmins, where I once took a ride from the airport all the way into the community of Timmins, a small community of about 50,000 people. A highway about 30 kilometres long was downloaded onto the backs of those municipal property taxpayers. They like to talk about tax increases, but they don't like to talk about the tax shift.

In this bill, there are a lot of really good pieces, especially for me as a member from northern Ontario. We remember the three-legged stool that we inherited from the previous government: a services deficit, a fiscal deficit and an infrastructure deficit. Everybody is very clear on those, and they don't want to talk about it. On infrastructure, I can tell you, we have great news in this budget, great news for northern Ontario and specifically northwestern Ontario communities. Small communities in my riding, like Oliver Paipoonge, 3,000 or 4,000 people with huge geographic areas to support, end up with about $2 million in infrastructure money.

These are communities that oftentimes even have a hard enough time finding the fiscal capacity in their municipal budgets to make the applications and spend the engineering costs necessary to apply to these programs in the first place. These infrastructure dollars in our budget, through the MIII program and through the formula-based program in the budget, are wonderful things, especially so for small rural northwestern Ontario communities.

0930

Mr. Jim Wilson: I listened carefully to what the government members had to say about this bill. I think they don't really tell the public the whole story when they use things like debt-to-GDP ratios rather than actually talking about the real debt. Since 2003-04, your first year, we had a public debt of—it has gone up about $47 billion dollars in the time you've been in office. You forget to tell the public that.

The honourable member from northern Ontario just spoke about infrastructure deficits. You're not even paying for your infrastructure. You're borrowing pretty well all of it from third parties. If I look at the Ontario Infrastructure Projects Corp., it had a debt of $323 million when you came in and set it up; it now has a debt of $1.95 billion. Sorry, $1,950,000,000. That would make more sense. So it has gone up several hundred per cent.

The seniors' tax credit: My colleague for Durham points out constantly that you're just giving back the health tax to seniors. You're not even doing that. My mother, as a retired schoolteacher, paid $600 this year in health tax. The maximum she'll get back in three years' time is $300. So that's a bit of an insult.

There's really no plan here, either, to look after the 200,000 people who are unemployed. You're spending a record amount of money on skills training, but skills training for what? For jobs out west. That's a shame.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concluded the time for questions and comments. The member for Pickering-Scarborough East has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I appreciate the comments coming from the members for Durham, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Simcoe–Grey. I'm always surprised, and maybe I shouldn't be, when members from the Tory caucus and some members from the NDP caucus are actually in agreement on things. I'm not quite sure what they're in agreement on.

I heard a lot about spending on health care from the member from Durham. Then I heard about tax cuts. I'm not sure what it is he wants to speak of, if he wants to speak to spending or speak to tax cuts. You really can't be doing both in an effective way.

With the 90 seconds or so that might be available, I do want to comment just briefly on the proposal we have in respect to poverty reduction in Ontario, dealing with those who are the most vulnerable as part of this budget process. We're making investments in this budget on our proposals for dental services for low-income Ontarians, which is a very important part of our campaign platform and an important part of what Ontarians of low income need. We've committed to raising the minimum wage. That, effective just last month, was raised to $8.75. We're on our way, on a structured plan, to get to $10.25 by March of 2010.

We're investing in a variety of other initiatives, including tax relief for moderate and low-income seniors on the property tax bill, to help offset things like general property tax or their school taxes as part of that. We are enhancing the Ontario property and sales tax credit program for seniors as part of that overall strategy as well.

So we're doing a great variety of things in the budget. We're dealing with infrastructure, we're dealing with innovation, and we're dealing with the economy. And we haven't forgotten those in our communities who are vulnerable, whether those be children; whether they be lower-income adults who may need dental services; whether it's seniors who need some degree of tax relief, but at the same time maintaining a property tax system that's fair to all. Thank you so much for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise on the third reading of Bill 44 this morning. I want to offer a few comments on the state of the economy as we contemplate the final reading of Bill 44. I want to address some of the amendments that we brought forward in committee as well, which we think would have substantially improved the bill. But surprise, surprise: One by one, the Liberal members of the committee—almost like they were whipped—voted them down, even though they were generous amendments to help seniors with their costs of living, for example, to encourage exercise, which you would think would be something that the Ministry of Health Promotion would have supported. But again, they all got voted down, I suspect because they came from individual MPPs as opposed to coming from the minister's office. So I'll talk about that a little bit, and talk about the difference in economic approaches that we're seeing in

Dalton McGuinty's old-fashioned tax-and-spend Ontario versus what other provinces have pursued successfully.

I do want to note as well at the beginning of my comments that today marks the second day of the new Liberal-friendly rules changes. There was a very good article today in The Toronto Star by Mr. Benzie, a very talented, insightful journalist whom members know in the Queen's Park press gallery, talking about the rules changes and how it's impacted on debate. I think it's important as we consider Bill 44 today. It didn't seem, as Dalton McGuinty promised, that we've seen the Churchillian rhetoric in these morning debates. In fact, this is about as exciting as the 9:20 p.m.—

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you; that's nice of you to say, Mr. Milloy. It was so exciting this morning in debate that John Milloy actually cracked a smile and giggled over there. It was the first time to see such a sight.

So it's not exactly much different from what you see at 9:20 p.m.; maybe we'll see some improvements here. What I found interesting about Mr. Benzie's article, I say to my colleagues, is that Liberal members have been saying off the record that they're concerned that this will impact their ability—because usually at this time of day, members would be addressing constituency issues and doing their roles as parliamentary assistants or critics; committees would be meeting; you'd be on the phone a good part of the morning trying to solve issues on behalf of your constituents and interacting with the ministers, their staff and ministries to get that job done.

Liberal members have been saying—rightly so—that that makes it much more difficult for them to do, and they seem to have pinned the tail on the proverbial donkey. I give credit to the Liberal members who had spoken with Mr. Benzie as part of the article.

The real goal of moving question period to 10:45 was to do two things. The goal was to limit the ability of the opposition to hold the Premier and his cabinet accountable, because it limits the time to prepare for question period. Granted, sometimes you have days ahead of time to prepare questions, and we'll still do that. But the other side of the coin, I would say, is that sometimes there's a story that's moving and you need to do the research. It does take time, whether you're contacting a source, through a library, a municipal partner or a hospital, to get an answer in time to propose your question for question period, and then get it on the list for 10:45.

I agree with the Liberal members mentioned in the article that the goal was to allow the government to kill issues early in the morning and to control the spin coming out of Queen's Park, so those stories don't get on the 6 p.m. news.

It also limits the availability—

Mr. Bruce Crozier: The article doesn't say that.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague says the article doesn't say that. He can stand up in his time of the debate and quote Mr. Benzie's article. That's my recollection when I woke up this morning after Miller had been up and got to my Toronto Star and my National Post.

At any rate, the other point, obviously, is to limit the access that the press has to the Premier and to various ministers. So they've made that change, and I guess we'll see how this works out. I figure the deal has been cooked to move the question period to that particular time for those two purposes.

In reality, my colleagues know that all you really need to do is move the night debates into the morning. We'd have orders of the day, continue that debate in the morning and then hit question period at a fixed, predictable time. We've suggested 1 p.m. That gives the opposition the opportunity to get good questions, do the research and bring them forward. It's a fixed time, to allow individuals and those with young children to adapt their schedules to a fixed time. I think it also would assist the press because they'd know exactly what time question period would be, the post-question-period scrums, and it would allow them to file their stories both for the noon news—the morning news of the day—and then following question period if there's a follow-up to those stories.

0940

I want to read back some Hansard, because I think it's important that we talk about Bill 44 and we have a substantive debate about the merits of the bill and the proposals therein. But I don't think I can pass without comment, noting that Bill 44 is being debated in a morning session. I want to reach back to Hansard from April 16, 2008. Premier McGuinty said, "I had the opportunity earlier today to speak with a group of representatives of various farm organizations. I'm not sure I could ever muster up the courage to tell them that we are, as a sacrifice now, about to begin work in this place at 9 o'clock in the morning. In our original proposal, we talked about working on Fridays. They said no to that," and the Premier goes on.

So the Premier is basically saying that now, all of a sudden, we're going to start work at 9 a.m., and I know my colleagues opposite start their days far earlier.

Mr. John O'Toole: Where is he? He's not here.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague notes that the Premier is not even in the Legislature at 9 a.m. We're not sure what he's doing. He's certainly not in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask you not to make reference to the absence of any other member in the House.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the point.

There's a good interjection here, by the way, from the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook to the Premier's comments, saying, "That's an embarrassment. How can you demean your members like this? You should turn around and apologize for that"—

I was called to order by the Speaker, rightly so. But I think it was a good point, because the Premier is basically standing here, saying to his members, like the member for Peterborough, that he doesn't start his workday at 9 a.m.; presumably he started his workday at 1:45 or 2 o'clock, when question period would often occur. I find it very unfortunate that the Premier has that kind of attitude

toward members of the assembly and his own members, basically insinuating that his members are not working at 9 a.m. when I know very well they are and have been, trying to solve issues for their constituents, doing their business as parliamentary assistants, committee work or in their role as critics, if they are in the opposition.

Again, the Premier said during that response in Hansard, April 16, "I just don't see how starting work here at 9 o'clock in the morning is such a tremendous sacrifice." Again, it's unfortunate—I bet some of you had the guts to stand up in caucus and call the Premier on this—that he would insult you in such a way as to suggest that you weren't working in the mornings merely because orders of the day weren't happening. We know full well, as you would, Mr. Speaker, that members of all parties would be working hard on behalf of their constituents much earlier than 9 in the morning. I wanted to note that as we began debate on Bill 44 and to remark on the unfortunate, demeaning attitude the Premier has exhibited even toward his own MPPs in the debate on the sitting times in the Legislature.

We address Bill 44 today, about a week after the Toronto Dominion research dropped a bomb on the province of Ontario. You'll remember that report. The report basically said that Ontario was heading toward have-not status. I was back in my riding this past weekend and I spoke to the Rotary Club in Grimsby, actually on Thursday evening, and this was the number one issue. Rotary, a very active group as a whole in the province and especially active in Grimsby, brought up this issue of Ontario having have-not status, which was shocking to them. Some members of Rotary are younger, some members of Rotary could probably be described as senior citizens, and they had never contemplated in their lives the notion of Ontario being a have-not province, begging thy neighbour for funds to come into our province.

We have always known an Ontario that was a leader in Canada—actually, under the previous PC government, a leader in North America—in job creation and in growth, the kind of province where people came from St. John's in Newfoundland, Victoria, BC, Yellowknife. They came to Ontario to make their way, to find a good job, provide for their families, buy a nice home, climb their way up the ladder. That was the Ontario we've always known: an Ontario that, because of its wealth and potential, would share with other provinces.

Now, after just four short years—well, in some senses, long years—of the Dalton McGuinty government, we find Ontario contemplating have-not status, meaning we're at the bottom rung of the ladder. This great province, with vast potential and incredible entrepreneurs, a hard-working, well-trained workforce that is accustomed to leading the country, is now laid low by Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend policies, at the back of the pack. We've gone from the powerhouse of Confederation to a poor cousin in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

So those watching at home now, who have moved off from—who would be on at 9 a.m.? They've moved away from Regis and—is it Kathie Lee still?

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Kelly. My apologies. The Regis and Kelly show—

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm at work.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Members are at work, as my colleague from Simcoe says, so he wouldn't know, but I guess the Regis and Kelly show. They've changed their channel now to the Legislative channel.

I want to refer to the TD Economics special report released April 29, 2008, the highlights of the report on the first page: "Ontario set to receive payments under the federal equalization program."

"Based on TD Economics' economic and revenue projections, Ontario is projected to qualify for equalization payments of $400 million in fiscal year 2010-11 and $1.3 billion in fiscal year 2011-12."

They go on to talk about how the other provinces are doing and that "Ontario's advantage has been slipping." They show the growth of Ontario's economy relative to the rest of Canada.

As I mentioned several times in debate before, and I want to stress this: For the first time ever, as far as I know, Ontario's per capita GDP, a measure of our wealth, has fallen below the national average, I believe, in 2006. When Dalton McGuinty came into office we were about $2,000 above the national per capita GDP, and now we have slipped below the national average for the first time. I think that gives reason to think, why is Ontario in the situation it is in, contemplating have-not status? That's because our wealth relative to the rest of the provinces on average has declined, fallen behind the pack; our job creation, as TD has pointed out, among other institutions, is now last in Canada when it comes to private sector job creation.

All of these measures have shown that Ontario's economy is facing significant challenges. I'll argue that it has been hobbled by Dalton McGuinty's policy of having business taxes that are the highest in North America, by having government spending increase, program spending, by some 42% under his mandate, without any real results that I believe taxpayers would say they have seen. Red tape has increased, throttling innovation and job creation in the province. That's underlying why TD Economics has noted that we have slipped in our GDP per capita relative to the national average and relative to the provinces that are doing much better than Ontario.

I do want to note as well that the Premier's reaction to this news was disheartening, to say the least.

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Don't worry; be happy."

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague from Simcoe–Grey says, "Don't worry; be happy." There's no doubt: One of Dalton McGuinty's typical responses to bad economic news is to replay the old Bobby McFerrin hit from the 1990s, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." He tries to change the channel by talking about other things like banning pesticides or allowing clotheslines—

Mr. John O'Toole: Sushi.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —or banning sushi, as my colleague from Durham notes. The reality is that Dalton McGuin-

ty's response is either "Don't worry, be happy," or, "We need more money from Ottawa."

You would think that a Premier worth his salt in the province of Ontario would say, "There's no way that I would let Ontario slip into have-not status, come hell or high water." A Premier worth his or her salt would call in the top ministers on the economic files: finance, economic development and trade, and energy, to name a few. He or she would call them in immediately and say, "How are we going to reverse this decline? There is no way, under my mandate, that I would allow Ontario to become a have-not province." That's what I expected Dalton McGuinty to say, to show some bit of leadership and say—this is a loud warning cry by TD Economics; this is an alarm bell that they hear from Ottawa to Niagara to Kenora—"There is no way, come hell or high water, that Ontario will be a have-not province." That's what a Premier showing some modicum of leadership would say.

What did we see from Dalton McGuinty? Instead of saying, "We'll try to combat this. We'll turn the economy around. I'm calling in my top ministers. We're going to have a plan. We'll get out of this rut. We'll move back to Ontario's proper place as a leader in Confederation," Dalton McGuinty was just so anxious to get his hands on more money.

Dalton McGuinty loves to spend taxpayers' money. Let's not forget that one of his first moves while in office was to break his famous promise where he said he wouldn't increase taxes on working families and seniors, yet one of his first bills did just that: up to $900 per individual and up to $1,800 per family, depending on income—a substantial increase on the backs of middle-class families and seniors in Ontario, one of the first things Dalton McGuinty did in office.

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Combined with that, he increased taxes, despite warnings from economists, despite warnings from business groups, despite warnings from Roger Martin, his own economic policy adviser at the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity. He increased taxes on business investments to now the highest in all of North America, chasing jobs out of our province. Some 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs, by way of example, have left in the last two years alone.

For every dollar Dalton McGuinty can squeeze from taxpayers, he's got three or four ways to spend it. Instead of talking about attacking the underlying problems, turning the economy around, making Ontario open for investment and private-sector job creation, reducing the red-tape burden and trying to give consumers a break so that they can spend in the local economy, Dalton McGuinty is more concerned about spending as much money as he can.

In a way, that's a bit duplicitous. He talks about the $20 billion that the province sends to Ottawa, and he makes it sound like if that money came back, it would all be in provincial coffers for the next Dalton McGuinty spending program. The reality is, unless it was transferred back and Dalton McGuinty increased taxes by that much—he may very well do so—it's a fallacious argument that those funds would go to the provincial treasury and then be parceled out in new spending programs.

Let me talk a bit about what consumers are facing in the province of Ontario under Dalton McGuinty. We did a bit of a research project, the PC research services. These numbers are relatively current; they're a little bit outdated. The values that I'll talk about have become slightly worse, but we found that a typical family of four earning $75,000 per year has seen their out-of-pocket expenses rise by $2,045 under the McGuinty government. A typical individual, sole-income earner, not a family, earning $35,000 per year in case 2 has seen her expenses increase by $1,110 under Dalton McGuinty.

When you work through the numbers on these examples, the health tax on the family of four would be about $750. Energy prices have gone up because Dalton McGuinty has increased them, I think despite campaign promises to the contrary. Yes, he did; he promised that hydro rates would be frozen at a certain level for a number—was it three years or so, Mr. Speaker? He broke that promise upon coming to office.

Mr. John O'Toole: Doubled.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My friend from Durham says that the cost of energy has increased significantly.

Mr. John O'Toole: Doubled.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The member from Durham says "doubled."

He's also planning on shutting down about 20% of our power by closing down the coal plants without any real plan to replace that power. That puts upward pressure on energy prices as well, and Dalton McGuinty has locked himself in as well to some long-term, expensive contracts to try to make up for that closure of 20% of our power supply through closing down the coal plants. The bottom line when we did this research was, the cost of electricity for that typical family was up about $140.

If this family used natural gas in its household, which a lot of families do—we're on propane in my home in Wellandport and natural gas when we're here in Toronto. The typical family of four in our example would have seen, in this time period, their natural gas costs go up $250 annually.

Gasoline has gone through the roof. Whether you're here, by Queen's Park, if you're back in Wellington county or if you're in Mount Hope, you're seeing prices at the pump of $1.20 and upwards. In fact, CIBC is predicting they'll go as high as $1.40, $1.50 this summer and even higher in 2009. At any rate, the calculation is that the typical family of four now is paying $490 more in gasoline costs than they had paid previous to Dalton McGuinty, so approximately $500.

New driver's licence renewal charges were brought in, which is a cost of $25 for an annual exam. I remember famously when Dalton McGuinty brought in the infamous health tax, which we know doesn't go to health care; it just goes to general revenue. He delisted, at the same time, health services from the OHIP stable, in-

cluding annual eye exams for adults, which now would cost $150, to this typical family of four. The foregone tax cut was $240.

Again, this was work we had done a couple of years ago, so I suspect the numbers are even higher now, because gas prices are higher than they were two years ago, as are energy prices, and there have been additional fees imposed on Ontario families. At any rate, when you add all those numbers up, I say to my friend from Peterborough, you get $2,045 in more expenses for this family of four. Now, does Dalton McGuinty tell Esso where to put their gas prices? No, we're not saying that. We are simply pointing out—you know what? My friend brings up an important point. Dalton McGuinty did say, when he was in opposition, running to become Premier, that he had three great ideas to hold the line on gas prices. Remember that?

Mr. John O'Toole: Name one.

Mr. Tim Hudak: He said he had three great ideas to hold the line on gas prices, and this was at a time when I think gas prices were about 70 cents a litre. Dalton McGuinty said that was outrageous and he had three great ideas to hold the line on gas prices. But again, once elected Premier, these promises and these ideas had been forgotten.

So we have seen the cost of living increase by over $2,000 for the typical family. Some things were in provincial control, like the health tax, like the delisting; they passed on some through the OEB, like energy costs, and they are about $2,000 behind where they were in 2003. So you would think that there would be pressure from the Liberal caucus. I know there's pressure from small business groups, the taxpayers' federation etc., to lower the tax burden, to give middle-class families and seniors a break, because it's awfully difficult to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, particularly when you look at those numbers.

For the sole-income earner—I gave that example as well—she would face a health tax, in our example, of $300 per year if she's earning $35,000. Energy costs, natural gas, gasoline—we allocated $245 in increased gas taxes. The delisted health programs, driver's licence renewal etc. works out to an impact of over $1,000 on the bottom line of a single-income earner in the province of Ontario.

Back to the issue of transfers, by the way. I do want to point out for the record the increase in federal transfers that has taken place. In 2005-06, maybe in the last year of the Martin government, annual federal transfers to the province of Ontario were $11.28 billion. There was $7.7 billion in the Canada health transfer, $3.1 billion in the Canada social transfer, $379 million for infrastructure, to $11.28 billion. In 2006-07 that was up about $600 million, to $11.8 billion. And then a substantial increase in 2007-08, the Harper government in Ottawa making good on its commitment to increase transfers to the provinces. It was $12.5 billion in 2007-08, and for 2008-09, $13.9 billion. That's with a $2.6-billion increase from transfers in 2005-06. I think anybody on the federal side, members of the opposition, I'm sure, and members of the Liberal caucus are wondering, with the $2.6 billion in increased transfers from the federal government to the province of Ontario, where did the McGuinty government invest this money? Are taxpayers getting their money's worth? I don't think we have seen a $2.6-billion increase in the quality of services. When we hear about wait times to offload ambulances in emergency rooms, when we hear about the backups in emergency rooms, about patients in beds in the hallways because they can't get a bed, when we see the lack of investment in the long-term-care sector, by way of example, when we see more students in portables than ever before—Blessed Trinity in Grimsby, by the way, has the sad distinction of having the most portables of any school in the Niagara Peninsula—you wonder where the $2.6 billion in federal transfers has gone.

I think one of our major challenges is that Dalton McGuinty goes to Ottawa cap in hand, as opposed to reacting to the have-not status by saying he's going to do everything he can to rejuvenate our economy and get people working again, and attract more jobs to our province. When he goes to Ottawa cap in hand, I think the challenge we face is that our chief salesperson for the province of Ontario has a briefcase full of broken promises. He will say one thing, and has a reputation of doing the opposite. When we've seen the transfers increase by over $2.5 billion, I think we in the assembly need to hear from the Premier exactly where those funds have flowed so we know we are getting an impact from that. I think if you ask my constituents in Niagara West–Glanbrook, they would say they have not seen that.

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Instead, what do we see? Well, the sunshine list of 2008 came out. If you look closely, the number of individuals on the sunshine list—these are government employees who earn more than $100,000 per year—has increased by over 42,000 since Dalton McGuinty came to office. I think a lot of the growth—well, we haven't seen much growth in job creation, as TD points out and I'll point out a bit later. Dalton McGuinty has increased the size of government by some 42,000 workers making $100,000 or more. That is about the size of Welland in the Niagara Peninsula, to put it all into perspective.

Let me give you some examples here. I mentioned that 42,000 Ontario government employees and workers in crown corporations, municipalities, hospitals, and colleges and universities are on that list. Ministry staff, by the way—these are political staffers who are on the sunshine list—have increased by 84% since 2003, ministry staffers who are making $100,000 or more per year. The chief of staff in Dalton McGuinty's office, for example, now hauls down $203,000, I guess heading up the 72 political staff who work in Premier McGuinty's office. One of the rare growth sectors in the province of Ontario is Dalton McGuinty's office, by the way: 72 employees, with the top dog making $203,000; I'd point that out. There are seven individuals who either work in the Premier's office or work for various ministers who make

substantially more than your average MPP makes. I thought I would point that out for the Liberal members. I think they do know this, but I thought it was an important thing to raise as part of the debate, when we're wondering where additional spending has gone.

The local health integration networks, the LHINs, are the middle managers that the McGuinty government created as opposed to investing in front-line health care workers—more doctors and more nurses. It created these bureaucracies throughout the province of Ontario to administer funds. A new level of middle management was created at substantial cost to the health budget and to the taxpayer. I don't think they could show in this Legislature that as a result, health care has improved. I think there have been a lot of meetings held, there has been new investment in furniture and new offices, and a lot more staff hired. But I don't see how these funds are translating to reducing wait times at West Lincoln Memorial Hospital or getting more doctors into the Mount Hope area. The local health integration networks, the LHINs, have seen the people making $100,000 a year increase from 13 to 53 from the time they got set up in 2006-07; 13 to 53 is a substantial increase. These salaries are typically in the $200,000 range. I think most taxpayers would see these salaries and wonder why they couldn't be going into front-line health care as opposed to this level of middle management.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation makes an important point on this—I think the central difference between the approach the McGuinty government would take and the approach that Progressive Conservatives would take—that Dalton McGuinty's job creation has been primarily, over half of it, in government jobs. We've seen a very anaemic growth in the private sector, one of the reasons why we are on the verge of becoming a have-not province. Kevin Gaudet from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation in the National Post on April 7, 2008, had a very insightful column. This is a release I'm quoting from, actually; similar thoughts were in his column in the National Post recently: "McGuinty Grows Public Service by 16%: Private Sector Grows by 2%." Quite a disparity.

To read from Mr. Gaudet's release: "'Jobs, jobs, jobs' was a catchy refrain during the federal election of 1984. Nearly 25 years later, the slogan may be making a comeback in Ontario. Yet this time, thanks to Premier McGuinty, it is the public sector rather than the private sector leading job growth. This approach cannot succeed because it does not add up."

Mr. Gaudet's central argument is that if public sector growth outpaces private sector growth, that is not sustainable. He backs it up with some interesting statistics: "During Premier McGuinty's tenure, Statistics Canada reports that private sector job creation has grown by 2.1%," which again, I remind you, is, if not last, close to last in all of Canada, "whereas the public sector has grown by 15.5%. There are now 101,882 more people employed by the provincial government than when Mr. McGuinty took power. That is triple the provincial population growth rate, which only grew by 5.3%. Over a similar time frame, the private sector only generated 108,000 net new jobs."

So the government jobs are approximately at the same level, for the provincial government, as private sector jobs, according to Mr. Gaudet. As I raised with the sunshine list, as I raised with the political staffers and such, I don't think taxpayers would be convinced that those jobs are being created in front-line services. Instead, we're seeing more folks in middle management—more spin doctors, so to speak—than those who are delivering services.

Another important comparison Mr. Gaudet brings up: "Notwithstanding the different economic challenges each faced"—here he compares Premier Bob Rae, Premier Mike Harris and Premier McGuinty—"it is interesting to compare Mr. McGuinty's performance on the job front to some of his predecessors." This needs to be underlined. "Mr. McGuinty has grown the public sector more than Bob Rae, Mike Harris and Ernie Eves—combined." I don't know if you knew that. It bears repeating. "Mr. McGuinty has grown the public sector more than Bob Rae, Mike Harris and Ernie Eves—combined. Over five years, Bob Rae shrank the public sector by 21,673 jobs and his high taxing and high spending policies drove net private sector job growth of a meagre 12,500."

It's an interesting point, when you see over the course of the Bob Rae mandate what happened with public sector jobs. They actually shrank by 21,000. Private-sector job growth over approximately five years was a very "meagre 12,500."

"...Mike Harris (and Ernie Eves), grew the public sector by 47,235." You always hear the Liberals say, "You cut this; you cut that." The reality, from Stats Canada data, is that Mike Harris and Ernie Eves "grew the public sector by 47,235 jobs."

"Of note is that the Harris growth came outside the main departmental bureaucracy, which declined by almost 10,000 during his tenure." When Mr. Gaudet talks about "departmental," he's talking about ministry staff, what we see as the layer of bureaucracy, the middle management. He says that Mike Harris reduced that by 10,000, but overall public sector job growth was 47,000, indicating the trend there was towards front-line delivery services as opposed to those working around Queen's Park—StatsCan data.

"Premier McGuinty may defend his record of public sector job growth saying he promised more nurses, more teachers and more doctors. While this is true," Mr. Gaudet says, "the data reveals that departmental staff has also ballooned—up by 8.8% to 102,180." So while McGuinty talks a good game, the reality is that the departmental staff—the term he uses for middle management—not front-line services, have increased by 8.8%, to 102,180.

Mr. Gaudet's concluding points are that it's important to note that "this increased burden on taxpayers comes at a time when the economy is facing trouble." He makes the correct point that, "A healthy private sector that

creates wealth and a tax base is what provides for jobs in the public sector, not the other way around."

So there is this fundamental difference in philosophy. Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend approach would be to grow as quickly as possible—since he's already left previous Premiers in the dust, so to speak—the public sector; therefore, buoy or juice a little bit the job creation statistics, and then hope that the private sector will follow.

The best approach that we've seen here in the province of Ontario and other jurisdictions is that you need a strong private sector creating new jobs, new companies, creating wealth. Then, when more people are working, more businesses are hiring and businesses are expanding, tax revenue increases and the province can invest in health care, education, police and other important services.

If you throttle the private sector economy, as we've seen Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend approach do, you have much slower growth—again, now at the back of Canada—which makes it unsustainable to continue to invest in needed public sector services. In a sense, it's a bit like David Peterson, déjà vu all over again, where spending got out of control, and then, when the economy slowed down, they had no room to adjust to stimulate the economy. As a result, he handed off to the NDP a significant deficit.

I do hope, and I could have expected in Bill 44, to see some approach by the government to reverse that trend, to say, as I mentioned before, "No way, come hell or high water, will Ontario ever be a have-not province; we're going to turn this ship around, help create jobs in the province of Ontario by creating a positive environment for business investment and expansion, so when 2010-11 comes around, the TD economics would be very wrong, they would be way off the mark, and their prediction would not come true." You would think that would be the approach of the Premier and the approach in Bill 44, but sadly, it's almost like he is looking forward to collecting equalization payments to fuel this runaway spending that I mentioned earlier on, rather than pulling out all the stops to halt Ontario's slide and put us back to the top of the pack in Confederation once again.

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We brought forward a number of amendments to this bill. Hard-working members of the finance committee—my colleague from Wellington–Halton Hills, my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk—brought forward amendments suggested by the PC caucus and suggested by me, as the finance critic. They were very reasonable, thoughtful amendments, but, as I mentioned, all of them were shot down.

Not everybody sees what happens in committee, so I thought I'd bring to the floor of the Legislature what some of those amendments were to make the case for them, and perhaps my colleague the parliamentary assistant—because I know he cares about working families and seniors in the province of Ontario—will help improve this bill. And if it's not going to be in Bill 44, maybe a subsequent bill will amend Bill 44 and bring in some of these good ideas.

Schedule A was part of the bill that we felt really missed the boat, so to speak, when it comes to assisting families and seniors in the province of Ontario. Schedule A of Bill 44 dealt with the Assessment Act and consequential amendments. Members of the assembly, like my colleague from London–Fanshawe—because I know he follows this issue very closely—will tell you that one of the results of Dalton McGuinty's freezing assessment increases is that Ontario homeowners are going to face a triple whammy of property assessment increases for the 2009 tax year. Those assessments will be coming out this fall.

Just by way of background, you will remember that the debate of skyrocketing assessments consumed this Legislature for some time back in 2005-06. All of us were getting tons of calls and e-mails from our constituents who saw double or triple per cent increases in their assessments and said, "How can I afford to stay in my home?" It was a real burden on young families with children to see their assessments going through the roof and the resultant tax increases they were paying; or seniors, particularly seniors whose spouse has passed away and who had lived for a long period of time in the family home which happened to be in a neighbourhood that was improving, and she or he had seen the house value improve to the point where they couldn't afford the property taxes because of the assessment increases. Their income was fixed, but their assessments and taxes were going up simply because of the neighbourhood they lived in.

The Ombudsman, André Marin, did a scathing report on the Municipal Property Assessment Corp., MPAC. Before Mr. Marin's report, the McGuinty government was not going to make any substantive changes to the way assessments worked, in the face of tripling assessments in the province of Ontario, until pressure here in the assembly and, I suspect, pressure in the caucus room from the Liberal members—I would certainly hope—and Mr. Marin's report moved the government to action.

The problem was, instead of addressing the underlying problems in the system, the Liberal government decided to, in what I would call a cynical move, postpone the pain until after the election. So, conveniently, assessments were frozen until after the 2007 election; new assessments would come out in September 2008. Because assessments were basically frozen for three years, that means that homeowners, in the fall, will open up their mailboxes, take out the envelope from MPAC and see three years of assessments hitting them all at once. As CAPTR and WRAFT, two groups for homeowners, have pointed out, substantial increases of double or triple percentage values are coming forward.

When the business sector faced similar increases in assessments, as we adjusted to the new system, the then PC government did bring in a capping system to help address and transition to the new system. At that time, in

the late 1990s, we didn't see the spiking assessments that we do today, and I think that a sensible response would be to bring in assessment caps.

I've brought forward a bill called the Homestead Act that would put a cap of a maximum 5% on annual assessment increases. It would also provide a modest but helpful property tax break to seniors and those who are disabled. It would also allow a deductible on home repairs, because there's a bit of a disincentive when you improve your home; you see an increase in value and therefore an increase in taxes as a result. So there would be a deductible to support home repairs.

That bill actually did receive support from many members of all parties. Here at the PC caucus we supported it, the NDP caucus supported it, and I think I had about 11 or 12 Liberal members who defied the Premier and the finance minister to support the bill. Unfortunately, it never proceeded to third reading. As a result, that is not the regime that we have in the province, even though I believe we should.

I think you'll know that populations representing probably half or more of North America do have some kind of capping regime. They have it in the province of Nova Scotia. We proposed it for Ontario. New York state, California, Florida, Michigan, Iowa and Texas, to name but some, have a form of capping regime—some lower than 5%, some higher than 5%, but they have a capping regime.

States that have faced similar pressure on property assessments have tended to react and bring in these caps, some through voter initiatives, some through legislative initiatives and referenda, but nevertheless, they do exist. I do hope that the government will consider that again when the triple-figure increases come out this fall.

We brought forward a motion to schedule A of the act to bring in that cap of 5%. It seemed very reasonable. I know that my colleagues presented it well and explained what the motion would do, but unfortunately, the members of the Liberal caucus did vote that down.

We brought forward a subsequent motion that said, "Okay, if you don't agree with 5%, if you think it should be higher or you think it should be lower," we were ready to give cabinet the regulatory authority to determine what that cap level should be, to give flexibility. If I'm wrong and if CAPTR is wrong and if WRAFT is wrong and assessments aren't going through the roof this fall as three years of assessment increases hit all at once, then cabinet would have no need to bring in caps. However, if we are proven to be right—and CAPTR has done a lot of research on this with a known real estate firm—then cabinet would have the ability to act to bring in caps of whatever percentage they deemed to be appropriate for the circumstances. But unfortunately, that amendment was defeated as well.

Basically, we brought forward a series of amendments to schedule A, the Assessment Act, to try to anticipate the skyrocketing assessments that homeowners will see this fall, but unfortunately, each of those was defeated, as was the proposal to allow a deductible for home repairs and home improvements.

We made some suggestions, as well, to the timing. We want to make sure that if homeowners disagree with their assessment notices, if they think the number is way off and they want to make an appeal—you certainly do need time to consider this. You need to look at like-valued homes. You may want to consult somebody who has some degree of expertise to give you advice whether it's worth pursuing or not. So we had made some suggestions for improvements to schedule A to extend the time period for appeals for various homeowners, but unfortunately, they were defeated as well.

I'll move on from schedule A for the time being and look at schedule B. Schedule B would give the Minister of Finance a new ability to make grants to various groups. It would be a new function for the ministry. It wouldn't have legislative debate; the minister would just be able to make these grants. We certainly have seen what happened with that abuse of power in the run-up to the last election, with the infamous slush funds scandal that saw a cricket club, to use the most famous example, that asked for $100,000 receive over $1 million in funding.

We had a simple suggestion that we certainly thought was of merit, that these proposals for the grants in the Ministry of Finance would first go to the assembly for the assembly to approve on motion. They have the votes; we recognize that. They have a majority government. They could vote these things through. But at the very least, why not bring some scrutiny by the Legislature of these new grants, so that they would receive approval by motion in the assembly, as opposed to simply being signed off by the minister in a backroom?

We also expressed concerns about schedule C of the act. Schedule C, of course, amends the City of Toronto Act, 2006, for reasons that aren't entirely clear. Andrew from the finance minister's office and representatives from the civil service came in and took the time to brief the PC caucus on this and respond to our questions; I do appreciate that. I want to thank them for that courtesy. It helps us to ensure that the amendments we bring forward are sensible and are addressing the purpose of the legislation.

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But schedule C, if passed as is in Bill 44, would basically allow the ministry to put a wide range of information into city of Toronto tax bills. These are municipal tax bills that are going out which indicate the level of tax, the value of the property. The city of Toronto may put some things in there about what they're spending money on, for example, but this would give the province of Ontario the ability to add things to the envelope. If there are specific purposes that the government had in mind and it was made clear they were doing this for purpose A—to inform the residents of the city of Toronto of plans to expand the subway north toward York University—I don't think members of the caucus would object to that. It's an important service for those in the city of Toronto and the GTA, and those visiting the city. I don't think we would object to something like that.

The problem is that they're asking us to buy a pig in a poke and give them blank authority to slip anything whatsoever into the tax bills under schedule C. We brought forward an amendment to make sure this new power would not be abused by this government or any future government. Clause 309(3)(a) of the City of Toronto Act would be amended under our motion to say that the minister would have to sit down with the city of Toronto and consult with them before they would insert whatever piece of propaganda into a city of Toronto mail-out on the taxes.

I don't know if time will allow me to get to subsequent amendments of this kind, but there are also amendments under this bill for municipalities outside of the city of Toronto. If you're worried about Elmira, by way of example, this bill would allow the minister to slip whatever he or she sees fit into a tax bill in Elmira. The amendments the PC caucus brought forward were that they should consult with the local municipality to make sure it's a shared purpose before inserting something willy-nilly into a tax bill. So we do worry about what the government's plans are because it was never made quite clear what the true intent of schedule C was and why they needed this new power. They didn't give us any particular examples of what they intended pursuing in the time ahead.

There was some debate here in the assembly and in committee over our amendment to schedule E. Schedule E, of course, amends the Corporations Tax Act. We moved that the tax rate for 2008 and later years would be at a rate of 12%. As I've said many times in the assembly, as my colleagues have said and as Roger Martin, the Premier's economic adviser, has noted, we have the highest rate of taxation on business investment in all of Canada. In fact, we have the highest rate of taxation on business investment in all of North America. Saskatchewan used to be ahead of us. Saskatchewan used to have the highest rate, and we were number two after Dalton McGuinty raised taxes on businesses. And then believe it or not, a New Democrat government in Saskatchewan lowered their corporate tax rate, leaving Ontario with the rather ignoble distinction of having the highest taxes on business investment in all of Canada.

I mentioned at the opening of my remarks the TD report warning that Ontario was on the downward spiral to have-not status. If you book-ended five days on either side of that announcement, you saw a worrisome trend. In Listowel, Ontario, a town of just a few thousand people, Campbell Soup, which employed 500 people, announced it was closing its doors. A major employer, a good corporate citizen in the Listowel community, affecting Lord knows how many homes, announced 500 layoffs. Can you contemplate the economic impact on a town of Listowel's size?

My colleague from Wellington–Halton Hills, by the way, asked a very good question to the Minister of Research and Innovation, who happens to be the MPP for that area, asking what he was prepared to do in his capacity as minister to save those jobs. Interestingly, that very day, the minister dodged the question and referred it to a colleague, which I thought was unfortunately instructive.

In the same week that we saw the Campbell's layoffs, some 500, we saw 900 announced layoffs at GM in Oshawa. Within a week, we saw Dell in the city of Ottawa announce about 1,100 layoffs. Very sadly, in Niagara we saw the announced closure of CanGro, which is a fruit cannery in St. David's. It employed, at one point in time, 150 people. I think 120 were told, around the time of the have-not report, that their jobs would be lost. It's not only devastating for those families, it has spin-off impacts on about 150 growers of peaches and pears in the area who will now be hard pressed to find a market for their product. People watching CHTV would have been greeted by the very sad image of tender fruit trees being uprooted, creating a brownfield in Dalton McGuinty's much-vaunted greenbelt. It takes six, seven years or more once you invest in a new tree before it starts producing fruit for market. It's particularly challenging for peach growers, because the clingstone peaches are meant for canneries, not for the fresh market. I do hope that the province, which failed to save that plant, will at least help the tender fruit growers transition and help them to find markets.

We brought in an amendment to schedule E which would at least have lowered the corporate tax rate to 12% from where it is today as part of the highest level of business taxation on business investment in all of North America, but unfortunately this is a government not interested in reducing the burden of taxes on businesses or working families and they, of course, voted down the amendment to the corporations tax rate.

We also proposed an amendment under schedule E to eliminate the capital tax altogether. It would have seen the capital tax, no matter what the business, eliminated by January 1, 2007, retroactively, to help stimulate job creation in the province. We're one of the last provinces, I believe, to have a capital tax. It's a tax on jobs; it's a tax on investment. It was originally scheduled to be eliminated at the same time as the federal capital tax, which would have been, if I remember, back in 2006. Of course, as part of Dalton McGuinty's bill that increased taxes to the highest level in all of North America, and part of his famous broken promise not to increase taxes on working families and seniors, we thought at the very least we could accelerate—

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague has an opportunity to correct the record, I guess, but I've seen time and time again that Ontario has the highest rate of taxes on business investment in all of North America. In fact, Roger Martin, the Premier's own economic advisor, has talked many times about the high rate of business taxation in the province of Ontario.

At any rate, we had proposed that the capital tax be wiped out in its entirety as of January 1, 2007. There's certainly the capacity in the budget to do so, but again Liberal members, I think taking their cue from the

Premier and the finance minister, were not interested in reducing the tax burden in the province and they voted that one down as well.

We had some other amendments to schedule E. In the interests of time I think I'll move on, but basically they are a compendium of amendments in schedule E to help reduce the burden of taxation on businesses, to help stimulate job creation.

Schedule L is quite interesting, and I believe it's schedule Q that went along with it. We brought forward amendments in both respects. Schedule L would call upon the LCBO to borrow for major capital projects. I think it uses the word "shall" as opposed to "may," so it's forcing the LCBO. If I recall, schedule Q would impose the same thing on the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. We have concerns that this is an attempt from the government to hide its borrowing in its agencies and to inflate the revenues that are coming into the province for additional spending. Again, we didn't suggest that this schedule be eliminated altogether. We thought we'd be reasonable about it, so we said in our amendment that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs would review these major capital projects, or even minor capital projects. The bill leaves it in the minister's hands to define, rather than forcing them to go into debt to finance them if they could finance it through cash flow.

My colleague from Simcoe North noted earlier on why we have this concern. If you look at page 156 of the government's recent budget, the net debt and accumulated deficit tables as of interim 2008, you'll see that the publicly held debt by the province in 2003-04, the first year that the McGuinty government came into office—that was split a bit between the Eves government and the McGuinty government, the McGuinty government, of course, being elected in October 2003.

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The level was $121.992 billion. I'll saw it off at $122 billion in publicly held debt. The plan for 2008-09, so within five years, is that publicly held debt will increase to $149 billion. As my colleague from Simcoe North pointed out rightly, we're seeing a $28-billion increase in publicly held debt under the Dalton McGuinty government. And we know what that means. That means a greater burden being placed on children and grandchildren in the province of Ontario. At a time that revenues are at record levels, largely due to Dalton McGuinty's tax increases and increased federal transfers, despite the fact that we have record revenues, the province of Ontario continues to borrow, which is actually amazing.

A $28-billion increase in debt, a new burden on future generations—interest payments will go up as a result—taking money that could be used in the budget for health care or education, now towards debt repayment: So how they score that circle, how they can say, at a time that their revenues increased by $25 billion or more, that they see fit to borrow an additional $28 billion beyond that, is simply breathtaking. My colleague from Simcoe North was absolutely right in calling attention to that. That's why we brought forward these amendments to schedule L of the act, and schedule Q when it came to the OLGC, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., now known as Ontario Lottery and Gaming, OLG.

Schedule O: As I mentioned, we brought forward an amendment not to eliminate but to restrict the ability of the minister to put whatever he or she chose into a municipal tax bill, whatever piece of propaganda the government wanted to put out there. We asked the minister simply to consult with the affected municipalities. It seemed very reasonable. I know reasonable members of the committee would probably, deep down, agree with this proposal, especially former mayors and municipal councillors, but unfortunately, this very reasonable amendment to schedule O of the act was shot down.

Schedule P: We also brought forward amendments basically saying that no order in council authorizing borrowing under this act shall be made after March 31, 2009. The reason we brought forward that amendment was that we were concerned with the level of borrowing that the McGuinty government is doing to fuel the runaway spending. As I mentioned, public debt has gone up by some $28 billion under the McGuinty government, so we weren't willing to give them a blank cheque when it comes to future borrowing that the McGuinty government might contemplate, and we made some companion amendments to that.

I mentioned as well schedule Q, dealing with the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., and our concerns that the government will try to put more debt on the backs of its public agencies. We certainly have seen some accounting trickery by the McGuinty government. We'll have a chance, I think, in the next few days to debate Bill 35. The time allocation motion was struck on 35. We went to committee and, as you may recall, the Auditor General had offered pretty strong criticism. It is not every day, in fact it's a relatively rare occurrence, that the Auditor General writes to a committee to the Legislature raising concerns about the accounting principles in a government bill.

We thought it very reasonable to suggest, and my colleague from Beaches–East York, Mr. Prue, had brought the motion forward—and we supported it—that we simply hear from the Auditor General. That would give members of the committee from all three parties a chance to ask the Auditor General and decide for ourselves if his critique of the bill—that, in his view, certain sections should be deleted—was meritorious or not. But, unfortunately, Mr. Prue's motion, that we supported, was voted down by the Liberal members, and the Auditor General was not able to come before the committee to raise his concerns in person.

We've raised our strong reservations about the accounting voodoo in that legislation. We feel strengthened in that because of the Auditor General's concerns in his letter, that this basically legalizes a slush fund that allows the cabinet, in the summertime, to allocate funding from a previous fiscal year to whatever group it deems appropriate—particularly when you think the

government may be politically motivated. It's hard for me to say such a thing, but that would be potentially in the run-up to the 2011 election when they could disburse these slush funds, and that's why we raise our objections to Bill 35, as well as Bill 44, before the assembly today.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm just going to read a few facts here. This sort of sums up how we feel about this budget.

Since Dalton McGuinty came to power, Ontario has lost 18% of its high-paying manufacturing jobs. That's $6.6 billion in wages out of the Ontario economy. That very scary number of 18% sounds good compared to the absolute devastation of the manufacturing sector that communities such as Hamilton have endured, where 30% of the manufacturing jobs have been lost. Outrageous.

But all this pales in comparison to the hit that Windsor has taken, where close to 40% of the manufacturing jobs have disappeared. Windsor now has the second-highest unemployment rate in Canada.

Here are some other numbers that demonstrate the depth of the job crisis in Ontario manufacturing and resource sectors. Under Dalton McGuinty's watch, 10,000 forest sector jobs, worth $869 million to the Ontario economy, have been lost. Northerners have lost seven out of 10 jobs. Ontario manufacturing employment stood at 913,000 in February 2008. That's a loss of almost 200,000 manufacturing jobs since 2004, or about 18% of the total manufacturing jobs in our province. Auto—parts and assembly—steel and forest products have been particularly hard-hit.

Stats Canada has found that the average worker who lost a job in the manufacturing sector suffers a 25% drop in wages in his or her new job. That's a loss of $10,000 in wages per worker. I guess those are some of the 147,000 jobs that this government likes to announce, while these people lost 25% of their income—not exactly something to be proud about.

I guess I'm finished with the time. Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I listened with interest to the speech from my colleague from Niagara West–Glanbrook. It was an interesting view of history, so I would just like to get the correct history on record.

Ontario, technically, was in a position to be a have-not province from 1977 to 1982, when William Davis was the Premier of Ontario. Why that happened at that time was because that was the first oil shock in the world. Oil prices have moved up rather dramatically, and because of the technical definition of the way equalization was formulated back then, Ontario was technically a have-not province and would have qualified, between 1977 and 1982, for $100 million under the equalization program. The government of the day, of course, changed the formula so Ontario would not get that $100 million.

What's interesting is that Mr. Davis was a huge supporter. As we can remember, Mr. Trudeau came back in 1980, won the federal election and brought in the national energy program. The premise of the national energy program was to have a two-tier price of oil—one domestic and one foreign. That would give the national economy a break by having a domestic price for oil, benefiting the economy of Canada.

It's interesting. I'd like to hear today—perhaps the official opposition would like to go back to that position. Perhaps they want to go to Ottawa and chat with Mr. Harper, the Prime Minister, and say: "Perhaps we need a two-tier price of oil, something that's half the price of the world price, so that the Ontario economy would get a benefit." I would like to see that happen. They should go to Ottawa today and demand from the Prime Minister that we really need a domestic price for oil, to give the central provinces of Canada a break, to cope economically with the high price of the dollar. "Give us a break on the price of oil," and then we would have those additional revenues to try to fund other things.

Every day, when they come in the House, the first question says, "You should cut back this and that and every other thing," and the second question is, "Spend more."

Mr. John O'Toole: I would like to respond positively to the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, our critic for the Ministry of Finance, as he watches this diligently. If you're looking at it as you would a report card, you would really come to one line that would summarize the outcomes after five years of Liberal reign. You would have to say taxes are up, jobs are down. Let's recall that: Taxes are up, jobs are down. Spending is up, jobs are down. Those are the numbers.

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Actually, if you look at the experts—and much has been mentioned about this important report, called Path to the 2020 Prosperity Agenda. This report is non-partisan. Just a few of the members that I have to celebrate here: Roger Martin, who I believe is the dean of the Rotman School of Business; Jim Balsillie, who's from the Research In Motion group; as well as David Johnston, who's president of the University of Waterloo. These are leaders giving advice in Ontario to Dalton McGuinty.

What are they actually saying? Roger Martin and the other experts on the panel are saying—and this is on page 45 of the report. It says: "Motivations: Pursue smarter taxation." One of the recommendations they give here is, "The incoming government"—meaning the McGuinty government—"needs to pursue tax reform as high priority to raise Ontario's competitiveness and prosperity." It's an important report.

In fact, what are they doing? They're doing just the opposite. If you look on page 47—here's the chart for all of the viewers—it says, "Taxation of new business investment is higher in Ontario than nearly all OECD countries." So the evidence is there: Taxes are up; jobs are down. Almost every sector is affected by this.

I'm very disappointed that there doesn't seem to be a plan here to address the young people here today and their future.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's certainly a pleasure to speak about the do-nothing, accomplish-nothing budget of the McGuinty Liberals. This is a budget that has no new

dollars for housing, in a province that has 170,000 households waiting for affordable housing. It has no dollars for a so-called anti-poverty program, despite the rhetoric to the contrary. It has no dollars for child care, despite being bordered by a province that has $7-a-day, quality child care and which brought in 20,000 more spaces for child care. That's the Quebec example, but that's Quebec; that's not Ontario. We don't care about children here, we don't care about the poor here and we don't care about housing here. The McGuinty Liberals have made it very clear in this budget.

Instead, of course, what we do get in Ontario is 200,000 lost good-paying manufacturing jobs and a government that has made it even more difficult to unionize by voting down our bill for card-check certification. What we do get in Ontario is handouts to corporate friends of the government, like GM, with no strings attached, so that we see jobs lost as a result of the corporate handouts. What we do get from this government is handouts to the wealthy at the expense of benefits for those who are middle-class or poor.

So again, what I would say about this budget, what we in the New Democratic Party would say about this budget, is that this is an accomplish-nothing, do-nothing budget, a budget I've characterized as the Oliver Twist budget, where those in need go cap in hand to the master's table and say, "Please, sir. Please, sir. Just a little bit more, sir." In fact, with this budget, they don't get anything.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

The member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, final comments?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I appreciate my colleagues' comments in response to mine on Bill 44. I never thought I'd see the day, though, that the member from Peterborough is calling for a national energy program, part two. I've been criticized for resurrecting the spectre of Bob Rae. Holy cats, Trudeau has made a comeback here in the Legislature today, calling for the NEP, which was disastrous for Canada.

My recollection—it was a while ago, back in the day. He references 1977 to 1982, when he said that Ontario qualified for equalization—which they never took, by the way. In fact, one of the reasons why Ontario did not receive money is because our income per capita was above the national average. That ain't true in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, my friend from Peterborough; that is not true anymore. Our income per capita now is below the national average for the first time in memory, and perhaps ever. We've always known that Ontario was a wealth creator, a province of prosperity, not below the average when it came to income levels for families in our province.

The other important distinction, by the way, to my friend from Peterborough, is that, if memory serves, Bill Davis said no; he did not want to take the equalization payments. He wanted to fight.

I would have expected that Premier McGuinty, when he got the word that Ontario was heading to have-not status, would have stood in his place and said, "No way will I let Ontario slip to have-not status. No way, come hell or high water, will I accept Ontario as a have-not province." I would have called in my finance minister, my economic development and trade minister, my energy minister, and I would have said, "By God, we're going to turn this province around and make it strong again, create jobs, and take us to the top of Canada." Instead, Dalton McGuinty says, "Don't worry; be happy." It's almost like he wants to bring in more tax dollars to spend rather than to turn our province around and make us friendly for job creation. That would be real leadership from the Premier, not this "Don't worry; be happy" attitude we see from these guys.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate on Bill 44 stands adjourned.

Third reading debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, in the east public gallery, I'd like to welcome the students from Pierre Elliott Trudeau High School in Markham.

In the Speaker's gallery, we'd like to welcome Ms. Debra Broderick, senior Hansard editor with the Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly. Welcome today.

On behalf of page Hannah Jansen, in the west public gallery, we'd like to welcome her grandmother, Nancy Millson.

On behalf of page Cali van Bommel, in the Speaker's gallery, we'd like to welcome her mother, Suzanne, and her sister, Petra.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: To the Premier: Premier, this weekend we learned about the tragic death of 87-year-old Florence Coxon, a resident of a nursing home. She is an example of the fact that today our long-term-care residents are older and they require more complex care than a decade ago. Today, 68% of long-term-care residents suffer from dementia or some other form of cognitive impairment. Considering these changes, why have you not implemented all of the recommendations of the Casa Verde inquest, which you know was called following the death of two residents in a Toronto long-term-care home?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: Let me repeat, as I had a chance to say yesterday in response to questions from the third party, that any loss of life is of course a very challenging and tragic circumstance, particularly for family members, and we are awaiting some of the results of the

investigation into the particular matter that you referenced at the top of your question.

With respect to long-term-care overall, our priority in the long-term-care-home environment is clear: It's to continue to add more staff. We have staffing levels at all long-term-care homes in the province that are much higher than those which we inherited in 2003-04.

With respect to the Casa Verde inquest, on matters like enhanced training for individuals working with a client load that has dementia, we've invested millions of dollars in enhancing their capacity to care for that part of the population.

I look forward to providing more information in the supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: What the minister didn't understand is that over the past 10 years, we have older residents and we have residents today who require a more complex level of care. There needs to be more staffing. There need to be more human resources.

He has not implemented the recommendations of the Casa Verde inquest. In fact, one of the recommendations in 2006 was to increase the level of personal care to an average 3.06 hours per day. Minister, why did you not respond to this recommendation for more hours of care for our frail and vulnerable residents?

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Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member references the higher levels of care required for patients over a 10-year period, which reaches back to cover her term in office as Minister of Health; it covers three of those years. But when her party was the government in Ontario, they eliminated all of the standards with respect to provision of care in our long-term-care homes. The standard they inherited from the prior government was 2.25 hours, and they eliminated that standard.

Through the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars and 6,000 additional people on the front line, the standard of purchased hours of care on a daily basis for our residents is nearly three hours—very close to the recommendations that the honourable member mentioned. We intend, through the budget that's been debated today, to continue to add resources, 2,000 additional nurses and 2,500 additional personal support workers, building to a standard of 3.25 hours—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: This minister ignored the pleas of the residents, families and staff for 24 more minutes of care, and you only gave them 4.42 in your recent budget. Furthermore, it was you, in 2003, who cried crocodile tears and who promised a revolution in long-term care.

You received a letter from the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. They told you in December that they were finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the volatile and aggressive behaviour for which they're not trained or resourced.

Minister, not only have you not implemented the recommendations of the Casa Verde inquest, we have now learned that you have been sitting on an internal report from 2006 outlining the models of care needed for patients exhibiting aggressive behaviour. Why have you sat on this report since 2006 and not helped our residents?

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm not aware of any report that the honourable member is mentioning, but I do know that within a few short weeks Shirley Sharkey will author a report that we've asked her to do.

The honourable member uses expressions to question my sincerity, but it was on her government's watch that standards in long-term care were eliminated. But there's a bigger question that I think must be asked in the circumstances. On this side, we agree we must have more care in long-term care. That's why our budget contributes nearly $300 million this year in new funding for long-term care while her party continues to propose a $3-billion cut to health care. They eliminated the standards. They eliminated the number of baths per week. There were no standards in long-term care when we came to office, and through hard work we brought 6,000 additional people to the front line. We continue to add to those in a budget that they will inevitably vote against, it would seem—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is for the Premier. Agencies and professionals are telling us that children's mental health in Ontario is in crisis, and this government is refusing to take action. In York region alone, 39,000 are on waiting lists and only 5,000 children are being treated. They face wait times for child psychiatric services of more than a year—devastating to children and their families.

Children with mild to moderate problems linger on these lists until they are in crisis. They have to get worse before they can get help. Why does your government refuse to provide enough money for children to get the services they need?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll allow the minister to deal with some of the specifics, but let me just say that this is another "spend" question, and it is difficult from one question and one debate intervention to the next to figure out where the Conservatives are coming from.

I don't doubt the member's sincerity when it comes to her concern for children's mental health issues and our shared responsibility to do more together, but how can she say that on the one hand, while her party holds the position that we should be taking $3 billion out of health care in the province of Ontario? It just doesn't make any sense. Either you're committed to this issue or you are not.

I'm proud to say that we are providing kids with the support they need to achieve their full potential. We have ended the 12-year freeze under both the NDP and Con-

servative governments. We've invested another $106 million in new funding since taking office, and 10,000 more children are being served.

The member is right: There is more to be done. But she can't say that we need to do more and take $3 billion out of health care at the same time.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Premier, early intervention is crucial, because a child's brain is still developing. Dr. Fraser Mustard has pointed out how we spend too little in the early years of life, when we could make the most difference. Dr. Rod Evans of the McMaster Children's Hospital says that children's mental health must be dealt with promptly to prevent greater suffering in the long term, yet in his city of Hamilton, the public school board has lost four support programs over the last three years, all under your watch. Reach Out Centre for Kids in Halton estimates the needs in the millions to provide proper services. Minister, why are children with mental health problems such a low priority for your government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, to the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm in a privileged role of working alongside the Minister of Children and Youth Services in enhancing capacity for access in the province of Ontario. But I do think it's interesting that the honourable member who asked the question didn't have any vociferous voice on behalf of these same children when she was in government. For eight years under that party, mental health at the community level didn't receive a penny.

We're expanding the number of doctors who can work with this client population. In York region, where the honourable member hails from, there's been a 36% increase since 2003 in the resources that flow to those agencies that work at the community level.

With respect to the early intervention and forming the child's brain, that's why we're making a substantial investment in expanding full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds.

Again I say to the honourable member: In one voice they call for reductions in health care spending; in the next voice they call for increases. That seems rather incoherent.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I just want to clarify that health care spending always increased under our government.

In Halton region, children are waiting, on average, 250 days for a preschool psychological assessment—250 days—and nearly a year for family counselling. In the minister's own town of London, parents had to fight to save the early intervention program at Vanier. Children across Ontario sitting on waiting lists are becoming worse and worse. When will you take action and spend the money these services need?

Hon. George Smitherman: We anticipate that with a question like that the honourable member will be supporting our government's budget, because it continues to make investments in health care, and she's abandoning the policy of her party, which is to call for a $3-billion cut to health care.

She says that in every year that they were in office they increased funding for health care. Ask the people at Southlake hospital whether they received more money every year. They'll tell you about 1995 and 1996 and about direct cuts. Ask anyone in the community mental health sector, bring them to the gallery, introduce them to the House, show us anyone who received a penny of increase for community-based mental health services for the eight long years that they were in office. You can't find one.

We've made substantive increases in this area. We agree that there's more to do. That's why we stand, as a party, prepared to make a commitment in expanding health services, rather than advance a $3-billion cut to health care, which is their plan.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: The recent census data shows that the McGuinty government's failure to take the loss of manufacturing jobs seriously has resulted in far more damage than the loss of 200,000 manufacturing jobs. In the greater Toronto area, where about four million people live, median family income has dropped an astounding 5.8% in just five years. In Windsor, median family income has dropped an even more astounding 9.8% in the last five years.

The Premier tells us that things are getting better. If that's the case, why are so many Ontarians experiencing a decline in median family income under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's important to understand what's happening to the economy. The price of oil is up; that's great if you're an oil-producing province, but in Ontario it's driving up our business costs. The dollar is up; that makes our products less attractive to buyers from outside the country. The US economy is down; that means there is less demand for our products. That makes a real challenge, particularly for the manufacturing sector and people working in that sector.

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That's why we've been very aggressive in terms of the kinds of support that we're making available. For manufacturers themselves, we have eliminated the capital tax retroactive to January of last year. That means $190 million immediately in their pockets at a time when they need it. When it comes to workers who have lost their jobs, we have placed, through our recent budget, $1.5 billion by way of an extraordinary measure into long-term training opportunities. We understand and we recognize that it's a challenging time. That's why we have risen to the occasion as a province and placed our investments where they need to be.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier talks about rising to the occasion. What ordinary people experience is an increase in the hydro bill, an increase in the heating bill, an increase in food costs, an increase in the cost of

gasoline, an increase generally in the cost of living, yet a decline in the paycheque. The Premier says that cutting the capital tax is going to make a difference. Banks and insurance companies love a reduction in the capital tax, but banks and insurance companies aren't suffering, not the way working people are suffering.

Premier, we've put forward a number of suggested proposals, proposals that have been adopted by other provincial governments; Manitoba and Quebec, for example. Why does your government continue to fail to take the loss of manufacturing jobs seriously? Why do you seem to be even unconcerned about the decline in median family income for so many Ontarians?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Facts are not unimportant in this place. We have the second-highest median income in Canada, behind only Alberta. So I would ask the leader of the NDP to recognize that and to admit to that.

Again, with respect to helping manufacturers, we have done a number of things that are lending real support to them. I mentioned eliminating the capital tax retroactive to January 2007. That provides them with $190 million in immediate rebates. We're also cutting their business education taxes. We're extending the capital cost allowance to 2012. We've extended digital media tax credits to 2012 as well.

Again, one of the things of which we are most proud is the continuing level of high investment we make in our workers. We have the highest rate of post-secondary education in the western world. But, clearly, that's not enough when it comes to the challenges faced by our manufacturers. That's why we put in place extraordinary long-term training opportunities.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the Premier struggles to miss the point. The point is that, since you've been the government, declines have happened for the majority of Ontarians in terms of their median family income. Almost everything that you've offered here as a solution—the situation has gotten worse since you've made those announcements or put those proposals on the table.

We put forward some very practical things: Reduce industrial hydro rates so manufacturers can continue to operate is one. Introduce a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit, so that manufacturers will continue to invest in their operations in Ontario. You refused that. Last week, we pointed out that allowing workers to join a union merely by signing a union card would help them to fight to protect their own wages. But you've rejected all of those suggestions.

Premier, why does the McGuinty government continue to take the loss of manufacturing jobs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just don't see it that way, and I know it's not a surprise for you to hear me say that. We've got a different perspective in terms of the best way to help.

The leader of the NDP believes in manufacturing tax credits. We believe in retroactive tax cuts. That puts $190 million into the hands of manufacturers immediately. Now is when they need it. The leader of the NDP is fond of attacking financial services in Ontario, but that's our fastest growing employment sector. I'd ask him to keep that in mind as he levels his continuing barrage at the financial services sector.

We have done much to help families. Whether you're looking at seniors and the enhancement of property tax credits, helping families with the cost of new vaccinations—saving them $600 per child—or the new investments we're making in nutrition programs in all of our schools, all those things are designed to provide some support to our families, who in many cases, I agree, are experiencing some challenging times.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier. We see a barrage against working families in this province. That's who we're concerned with, more than we're concerned with banks and insurance companies.

What I also want to raise here is, in 2005, with much fanfare, the McGuinty government signed an agreement with the federal government that committed $678 million for affordable housing. The federal government would provide some money; the McGuinty government had to match. Shockingly, the McGuinty government used only $285 million of the federal funds, which meant $300 million of available federal money for affordable housing has not been used.

Premier, with thousands of families in Ontario looking for affordable housing, how could you leave $300 million of federal money on the table and not use it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: Once again, the NDP is completely wrong, and I would suggest that they get their facts straight. We have, as a government, allocated our $301 million, which is the matching money from the federal government—the previous federal government, I might add—and the response we have received from stakeholders and service managers throughout the province of Ontario has been very positive. To date, 4,774 units have been built, 2,537 are under construction, 3,800 are awaiting planning approval and 8,149 are with local service managers making sure they get those projects right. It takes time to plan, to get the zoning, to build these houses. Every single cent of the federal money will be spent in the province of Ontario, providing affordable housing for those people in need. We're proud of the program and we hope the federal government comes to the table and renews the agreement, as it expires on March 31—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Here is the reality: The agreement has expired and $300 million of federal affordable housing money has been left on the table by the McGuinty government. What this means is that the McGuinty government promised over 20,000 units of

affordable housing but, as the minister himself admitted, you've barely got 4,000 units of affordable housing. Meanwhile, we have 170,000 people in the province of Ontario looking for affordable housing.

I ask again: With so many people looking for affordable housing, in desperate need of affordable housing, how could you leave $300 million of federal affordable housing money on the table and not use it?

Hon. Jim Watson: I would suggest that the honourable member put a little bit more money and effort into hiring better researchers, because he's got it completely wrong once again. We have taken a holistic approach to housing in the province of Ontario. Not only are we building new affordable housing—and I just gave the honourable member some of those numbers—we're also putting a substantial amount of money into rent supplements. In fact, over 14,000 individuals have already applied and received $100-a-month ROOF cheques from the province of Ontario. We also have the DOOR program, that has gone to providing rehabilitation and repair on some of the units. We put in $100 million that the NDP—only the NDP, only socialists would call $100 million meagre, but we consider that $100 million significant in repairing some of the stock that, quite frankly, is not in very good shape.

We still have $80 million that we are working with the aboriginal community with to ensure that they—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: It is interesting that the McGuinty government would mention the rental subsidy program, because that also expired on March 31, 2008. It was an $80-million program from the federal government, of which the McGuinty government used only $25 million. That means that there are low-income people out there who should have been able to access rent subsidy and they've had to do without. Fifty-five million dollars has been taken out of their pockets by the McGuinty government because you didn't take up the federal rental subsidy money. Now, on March 31, 2009, the other $300 million that is sitting on the table for affordable housing will expire as well.

I just say again: With people facing reduced wages and higher costs of living, how could you leave hundreds of millions of dollars of federal affordable—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

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Hon. Jim Watson: For the third time, the honourable member, the leader of the third party, has it completely wrong. The March 31 expiry date is for federal programs such as the RAP program. The affordable housing program does not end on March 31. It means that there's no new money coming forward. That's why I, along with other provincial and territorial housing ministers, have taken the lead to pressure the federal government to come to the table. The money he speaks of with respect to ROOF does not expire on March 31. In fact, it's a five-year program. It goes for another four years.

I encourage the honourable member (a) to get his facts right, and (b) to encourage his federal cousins in the NDP to start putting some pressure on the Harper government. Stop being an apologist for the Harper government and get them to come to the table and support affordable housing in the province of Ontario.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: To the Minister of Health: As you know, on the weekend, Dr. Ken Arnold, the new president of the OMA, called on your government—and by the way, Minister, he didn't go back five years to ours; he called on your government—to tackle the critical doctor shortage, which is estimated to be 2,000 physicians. He also stated that there are about one million Ontarians without a family doctor. As you know, that's the same number as in 2003. Minister, how are you going to respond to this cry for help from the doctors and from residents without a family doctor?

Hon. George Smitherman: We want to congratulate Dr. Arnold. He's come into life as the one-year president of the Ontario Medical Association, following on the heels of Dr. Willett of Sault Ste. Marie. I've enjoyed a privileged relationship with—I think he's my sixth president of the OMA.

Since our government came to life, we've dramatically renewed efforts in Ontario to train doctors, something the previous government wasn't particularly committed to. We've introduced new models of care—the family health units—and we've done a substantially improved job of taking advantage of the skill set of foreign-trained doctors in Ontario. That means that 550,000 additional Ontarians gained access to care. But the number of unattached patients is decidedly below one million, and of those, many are not even looking for a physician today in the province.

We've made tremendous progress, in partnership with Ontario's doctors, and we have every intention of continuing to move forward and provide care to a higher number of Ontarians, something the honourable member's party wasn't capable of.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I think the minister has a selective memory. He doesn't remember the two medical schools we announced or the expansion of the program for foreign-trained doctors and many other initiatives, but that's not new. This person has been here for almost five years and, I'll tell you, we also know that under his watch—again, he can't go back and blame anybody else—the number of underserviced communities has jumped to 142, from 122 in 2003.

In fact, here's an example of what's happening because we don't have the doctors. The Richmond Lodge, a 42-bed retirement home in eastern Ontario, has been looking for a doctor for over a year. Lots of long-term-care homes are, by the way. They mailed over 100 letters to local doctors, without success. They brought the situation to the minister's attention. Do you know what he said? "Here's the address and phone number for the

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. Go look after it yourself." Minister, how are you going to deal with the needs of these—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say to the honourable member that previous presidents of the OMA have made the point well that if we had continued with the status quo, that is, the policies that we inherited from the honourable member's government, there would be 1.6 million people in Ontario without a family physician. As a result of the efforts that we've made, through the surveying that we've had, the number of people is substantially below one million.

The honourable member talks about announcements that she'd made, but we're the government that spent the money to enhance the size of Ontario's medical schools by nearly 30%. They want to cut $3 billion from health care. We've introduced the model of family health teams, as well as nurse-practitioner-led clinics, the first of which is now functioning in Sudbury and which will be expanded across Ontario. In the next four years, we have every expectation of enhancing by at least one-half million the number of additional Ontarians who gain access to the kind of care that the previous government was uncommitted to and incapable of providing. We've made tremendous—

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Three times now—at least three times—the minister has made an error. I won't say that he lied. We're not going to cut $3 billion from health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment that you just made, please.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I will withdraw if he'll not make further statements—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday in Peterborough and again this morning in Cobourg, I and dozens of other local community members were barred from attending the government's so-called poverty consultations. In a shameful and appalling display, yesterday security guards and today police were present to keep the poor out of the consultations. Obviously this government is running scared. Why doesn't the Premier tell his poverty minister to open the doors to the government's consultation? Of what are you afraid?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question. I disagree with the perspective of my friend. We're running towards poverty. We're trying to get our arms around it, trying to better understand it. I've asked Minister Matthews to head up a cabinet committee. I've asked her to provide us with some reliable indicators that we can use to measure poverty. I've asked her to put in place some targets that we can work towards and to develop a strategy to help us achieve those targets.

Let's understand whom Minister Matthews met with yesterday. She met with representatives of community housing, income advocates, the mayor's task force on poverty reduction, the United Way of Peterborough, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the county health unit and the dental coalition, and then she had dinner at the youth shelter. She's out there working hard, collecting ideas. The member knows that we have a website; he can access that any time. He has the opportunity to question the minister when she's present here.

Mr. Michael Prue: I think what the Premier forgot to say is that MPPs who are not Liberals have been barred so far and the poor have been barred so far.

I know what this government is afraid of. This government is afraid to hear from low-income families who are facing cuts of up to 39% on their Ontario Works basic needs. This government is afraid to hear from low-income families who are having their back-to-school and winter clothing allowance terminated.

Why won't the Premier stop classifying poor children as deserving if their families work and undeserving if they're on Ontario Works, provide the full Ontario child benefit to all children without new cuts and without new clawbacks, and listen to the poor?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We accept our responsibility to do more to help the poor, and poor children in particular. If it's not simply a moral imperative, it's a matter of enlightened self-interest. If our children do well, then we all stand to do well, both as a society and as an economy. That's why we've put in place our Ontario child benefit, to benefit 1.3 million children.

Today in Cobourg, the minister is meeting with the district health unit, the youth advisory council, the children's aid society, the United Way and the county of Northumberland social services. Minister Matthews is working hard to help us better understand the nature of poverty and what specifically we can do to help address some real and pressing issues for Ontario families.

BROWNFIELD SITES

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, brownfield properties are lands that are contaminated due to historical, industrial or commercial land use practices. These properties are often former gas stations or industrial facilities. The city of Cornwall and the townships in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry have their share of brownfield sites. Cornwall is doing a commendable job of cleaning up these properties and ensuring that they see new life. Lots, like the former Domtar site, having been bought by Paris Holdings, will soon be repurposed, allowing for exciting new opportunities for the city. We should all be proud of the work Cornwall and the communities are doing, in essence, to turn lemon properties into lemonade.

Minister, what is this government doing to support such endeavours?

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Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very proud of the McGuinty government's commitment to the revitalization of brownfield properties throughout the province of Ontario. In fact, in last year's budget, a total of $11 million was assigned to various projects throughout the province of Ontario. We've also instituted the brownfields financial tax incentive program to make it a little easier for those responsible landowners who want to revitalize those brownfield sites for commercial development or, in fact, housing. We've also made it easier to ensure that crown liens are taken off the properties in question, introduced greater flexibility into the tax sale process, and generally recognized that brownfield redevelopment is not only good for the environment, it's also good for the economy.

We're very proud of what's happening in Cornwall, and I thank the honourable member for his leadership in encouraging brownfield developments in his beautiful city.

Mr. Jim Brownell: I am proud that our government believes in working with communities in transition, like Cornwall and area, to bring new life to old properties. In fact, more than one minister, during visits to Cornwall, has expressed interest in the exciting waterfront loft condos being planned for the city's Cotton Mill district. No mention could be made of the city's brownfield development without due recognition going to local groups, such as Heart of the City and Groupe Renaissance, and individuals like Chuck Charlebois and Denis Carr.

Speaker, you have had the privilege of speaking to these men when you visited my riding and seeing the great work they do in assisting developers in redesigning older buildings in brownfield sites. Projects like these are helping breathe new life into communities like Cornwall and others in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

To the minister, what programs are available to assist community development groups such as Heart of the City and Groupe Renaissance in drawing and supporting development in Ontario's communities?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just stop the clock for a second. I'd just like to remind members, particularly on the government side, that yes, at one point I had a very partisan role that I did play, but I'm conscious of having backed away from that. I'd just ask that in your questions or answers you not refer to me in that former role that I once played. I'd appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the member for the question. We're proud of what we've done in Cornwall. In fact, in the 2007 budget, Cornwall received a $1-million unconditional grant for brownfield redevelopment. Also, something that we're promoting in the province of Ontario through our ministry is brownfield redevelopment for affordable housing. We provided $2.1 million under the affordable housing program brownfield initiative that was set aside for affordable housing in Cornwall. An RFP was issued in the spring of 2008, and the ministry is waiting to hear the results of that proposal call. Municipalities can add to the value of municipal tax relief through the brownfields financial tax incentive program.

I just wanted to highlight the other programs above and beyond the good work being done in Cornwall: $5 million for Brantford, $3 million to Hamilton, $1 million to St. Catharines and $1 million to a very exciting project in my hometown at the University of Ottawa.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, as you know, the Central East LHIN has recently approved a plan to move 20 in-patient mental health beds from the Rouge Valley Ajax hospital to the Scarborough Centenary site. This decision, as you know, has been extremely unpopular in the community and was made without any consultation with them. There have been numerous large protests, most recently the one with 700 people over the weekend.

The decision has also been frowned upon by psychiatrists, and I quote from a letter written by Ajax psychiatrists to members of the Rouge Valley board: "It is our strong opinion that the elimination of acute care beds will compromise the quality and safety of care for those seriously ill patients." The letter goes on to state, "The lack of speedy access to service for these patients could place them at great risk."

Ajax has only four psychiatrists. In the peer review initiated by the Rouge Valley board, it states that "equal attention must be given to those who cannot or do not advocate for themselves."

Minister, why won't you listen to the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Health?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for the question, of course. I've been dealing with this matter with many members of the Legislature, most notably my colleague from Ajax–Pickering, who has expressed strenuously some of the same sentiments.

I would correct one small piece of the honourable member's question, where she seems to suggest that these beds are closing. In point of fact, of course, the local health integration network area and, indeed, the hospital organization of the Rouge Valley Health System will have exactly the same number of beds. The proposal is that they be co-located for the purposes of being able to save about $600,000 in resource and enhance the critical mass of supports that can be offered to this population group, which is very, very worthy of a high degree of support.

Alongside these continuing investments in mental health services is a substantial additional investment in community-based mental health capacity.

Overall, I'm very confident that the Central East Local Health Integration Network has more resources for

mental health, but I'm very, very mindful of the concerns in the local—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: If I may say to the minister, the problem is that when you locate those services in a different community altogether, you remove those supports from the people who need them within the community. So it weakens the community health services as well.

The expressed reason for making this move was to save $600,000 over three years, yet I understand that there are deplorable physical conditions at Scarborough Centenary, with mould spores and so on. Also, there have been some safety-related issues. Witness the injury at Scarborough Centenary on April 16, when a patient injured himself so extensively that the ER was shut down for half a day and a special investigations unit had to probe it. Given the extensive physical work that needs to be done at the Scarborough site, which will far outweigh the $600,000, why are you making this move in the first place?

Hon. George Smitherman: First off, I appreciate the backhanded compliment that was there, acknowledging the nearly $100-million capital program that's currently underway at the very Ajax site that the honourable member also speaks about.

The benefits associated with co-location are not limited to some capacity on the financial side. It is also that having a critical mass of mental health services on one site should enhance the capacity of that program to support people.

While I do acknowledge that those in Durham might see crossing the Rouge River as another jurisdiction altogether, the people who are coming from other parts of Ontario to receive care at Sick Children's hospital or Princess Margaret Hospital are mostly focused on the quality of the care that is provided.

I understand that the community is unsettled, and changes can do that. The member knows well about some of the impacts in Whitby from the changes that the previous government brought forward. But I'm very confident that, overall, the range of health care services related to mental health in this area of Ontario is increasing, not decreasing.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Minister of Education. You promised full-day kindergarten classes in your election campaign, including at Toronto Catholic schools. St. Thomas More was supposedly one of your inspirations for that campaign promise. Now we learn that the Toronto Catholic District School Board will be forced to cut proven, effective full-day kindergarten programs to cover budget shortfalls. St. Thomas More school now stands to lose the very program that inspired your government's campaign promise. Will the minister visit St. Thomas More and explain to those parents why, despite her earlier promise, their children may be losing their full-day, full-time kindergarten classes?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member for the question because it does given me an opportunity to talk about a great initiative, which is that we have asked Dr. Charles Pascal to give us some advice on how best to expand full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. We know that that kind of programming will help our kids in the long run.

The fact is that there are boards around the province that have made decisions, historically, to put programs in place that, albeit beneficial to kids and a good idea, are not things that traditionally have been funded.

The board, right now, is making decisions about its budget. The fact is that this board, the TCDSB, has had a $132-million increase since we came into office. That's an 18.6% increase, when they've had a 7% enrolment decline. So there actually is some flexibility in their funding.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's their funding formula and it's their rules that result in the budget deficit to the Toronto Catholic board.

Here are the facts. The full-day kindergarten program implemented by the Toronto Catholic District School Board is so successful in boosting skills in younger students and allowing teachers to connect with students that your government, the McGuinty government, used its success to boost its election campaign. That's a fact. Now the Toronto Catholic board is forced by your funding formula and your rules to cut $14 million to balance their books, putting that successful program in danger. That is a fact.

So I ask again: Will the minister commit to the children of the Toronto Catholic board that she will not cut their full-day kindergarten classes to pay for a budget shortfall?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: If the member opposite is looking to me to make an argument against full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, she's not going to have that satisfaction. What we have done is we have made a commitment to put $200 million in the third year of our mandate, $300 million in the fourth year of our mandate, but we're going to take the advice of Dr. Charles Pascal.

In the interim, boards like the Toronto Catholic school board, that have seen declining enrolment and yet have got increased funding, are making their budget decisions. They are setting their priorities, and they have control over the way that funding is allocated. It is up to them to set their priorities within the budget that we have given them—reminding the member opposite that there has been a 6,585-student reduction in that board, yet they have $132 million more to work with.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation. It's spring, and it's time to get out the lawn mower. Many small-engine products, such as lawn mowers, are powered by high-polluting, two-

stroke engines, emitting as much as 25% raw, unburned gasoline in their exhaust. Litre for litre, lawn mower engines contribute 93 times more smog-forming emissions than cars.

According to Statistics Canada, gas-powered lawn equipment releases about 80,000 tonnes of emissions in Canada every year, using 151 million litres of gas.

Minister, in my riding of Guelph, Linamar consumer products is developing the Terra Phase Power system, which is the first lawn mower of its kind to offer the performance of a gas engine with a cordless rechargeable engine.

Mr. Speaker, through you, what is the Ministry—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Research and Innovation.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend for the question. I had the opportunity, actually, to visit the company in question.

Through my ministry, we have the innovation demonstration fund, and it is focused on trying to help innovative companies that have new technology to meet a market demand. I think we'd all agree that consumers want to be able to go green.

As the member said, when you use a gas lawn mower, it pollutes 93 times more powerfully than a car. So a new technology called the brushless motor has been adopted by the good people at Sterling, which is a subsidiary of Linamar, and they have created a brand new product that has the power of a gas lawn mower—which people want—and it's cordless. As a matter of fact, it can actually be charged by solar power. So you'd be able to cut your lawn and have absolutely zero emissions.

So I was proud to announce a $1.8-million loan from the innovation demonstration fund to Sterling. I want to thank the member for having me there for a visit.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: This project shows how innovation can lead to a greener Ontario. I am proud that this innovative lawn mower is being produced in Guelph, and was pleased to join Linamar for the announcement of our $1.8 million in funding last week.

Linda Hansenfratz, CEO of Linamar, stated: "We're thrilled with the support we have received from the Ontario government as well as the enthusiasm we're seeing in the market for our 'green' lawn mowers."

In fact, Annette Verschuren, CEO of Home Depot Canada, says the Linamar mower is the third most frequent hit on the Home Depot website.

So, while the opposition may not think this is good news, Ontario consumers do think it's a great, environmentally friendly product.

Can the minister outline the positive impact that the Linamar project in Guelph and other innovation demonstration fund projects are having on our Ontario economy and on our environment?

Hon. John Wilkinson: It just proves that our government understands that our industries in this province want to go green and they want to meet that consumer demand. As the member said, you can actually buy one of these lawn mowers at Home Depot.

We believe that there is a large market for this. It allows us to do a number of things. One, it is generating jobs and demand right here in our province, and that's good for the economy. Secondly, it's very, very good for the environment. To think that everyone who owns a piece of property that has a lawn needs to cut it; it's something that we do, so our ability to do that in an environmentally sustainable way and create jobs in Ontario—I can't think of a better win-win. That's why our government has invested in this and so many other projects.

I can think of the project, for example, at Plasco, one of our other innovation demonstration funds, where we're using new technology, plasma arc technology developed here in Canada, to turn waste into energy: again, an environmentally friendly, sustainable way—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Health. In my riding of Thornhill and in neighbouring ridings throughout southern York region, people are anxiously awaiting an announcement pertaining to the next steps in moving ahead with a Vaughan hospital, to which the minister has made reference publicly and in this House. The minister is aware that care access is in crisis, notably in the 905. Even if approval were granted today, we'd be five years away from cutting any ribbons.

Is the minister prepared to confirm that a Vaughan hospital is in our future, with an announcement to that effect coming imminently?

Hon. George Smitherman: I did have a chance by private conversation to let the honourable member know that he'd be amongst the first 10,000 people to know when the announcement was coming forward. I've been discussing this matter very forthrightly with my colleague, the member who represents Vaughan, recognizing, of course, that many constituents in Thornhill are also in need of these expanded services.

We're working very closely—the local health integration network has been in the lead in developing a proposal for the delivery of health services in the Vaughan community. While there are many hospital projects in the province that are very noteworthy and important, this is amongst them. Although I don't have a date for an announcement today, I can confirm for the people of Vaughan—reconfirm for them—that it is our government's anticipation to make the investments that will see health care services enhanced in the Vaughan community.

Mr. Peter Shurman: That's good news, but it's only half news. No body of people more than those in southern York region were more acutely aware of the much-heralded revolution in health care for Ontario. The Vaughan hospital would begin to address a glaring disparity and needless difficult travel.

The minister has the positive recommendation, as he stated, of the local health integration network on his desk.

Can we begin to see some redress in favour of the underfunded 905 today by way of an announcement, at least for the master planning stage of the Vaughan hospital, so that York region constituents can look forward to this dream becoming a reality?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, I have to remind the honourable member that he did run with a party that proposes cuts to health care, which would make the advancement on this project difficult.

He looks for an announcement about Vaughan as a sign of our government's commitment to addressing funding inequities in the 905, but he merely needs to go over to Richmond Hill and look at the hospital development that's underway. He could look just slightly to the west and see the more than $800 million we've invested in a new hospital in Brampton. He could go to Southlake hospital in Newmarket and see the expansion underway of a regional cancer centre. Very, very soon, he'll be able to go to Markham and visit the expansion—much-needed expansion, I might say—of the Markham hospital.

In that context, in York region there's plenty of evidence that abounds about our commitment. I acknowledge the need to make more progress in Vaughan. I look forward to seeing the honourable member in the audience when we make that announcement.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Last week, in a letter to prominent Ontarians regarding the jailing of First Nation leaders, you indicated your government was pursuing, "strong and positive relationships with First Nations." Yet I want to quote your government's lawyer. When the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug leadership were sentenced, he said, "I'm suggesting a financial penalty that hurts ... the very fact that it will hurt means that it's the appropriate penalty."

Premier, are crushing financial penalties to impoverished First Nations like Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug the basis of your new "positive relationship" with First Nations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: As the member is aware, the government has made, and continues to make, a number of efforts to avoid the incarceration of Chief Morris and council. As the member knows from reading the transcript, the Attorney General's agent opposed incarceration. In fact, it was the Attorney General who brought a motion to expedite the appeal which is before the courts.

But in any event, I'm happy to recognize that significant efforts have been made to try and resolve this. We will continue to try and resolve this, as we are seeking solutions to try and come to an agreement to find a solution, not only in KI but across the province.

1140

Mr. Howard Hampton: You haven't answered the question, but I do have the transcript from the sentencing hearing. What's interesting is the McGuinty government's lawyer doesn't argue that jail is wrong. He says, "Jail is not the appropriate remedy" because it allows them to portray themselves as martyrs. "Your Honour, it allows them to portray themselves as martyrs."

My question again: Is this the reality of the McGuinty government's positive relationship with First Nations? You wanted a sentence that would "hurt" the First Nation, but you didn't want a sentence that would allow them to portray themselves as martyrs. Is that the reality? Because that's what the court record shows.

Hon. Michael Bryant: First, the member stood in the House and suggested that it was the government of Ontario that had jailed First Nations, and he was wrong. Then he suggested that, in fact, the government somehow was advocating for incarceration, and he was wrong. Now the tactic is, "Let's attack the crown. Let's go through the transcript and attack the crown." The bottom line is, the Attorney General opposed incarceration, period. The Attorney General is, in fact, supporting the appeal, period. If you want to look at the transcript, we have the unusual situation where defence counsel—counsel to chief and council—says, "I'm in the odd position whereby the crown says, 'no incarceration,' and I find myself supporting incarceration." In fact, defence and crown attorney opposed incarceration. That was the position, that is the position and that will be the position. We will continue to pursue a resolution outside of these courts in order to achieve justice in KI.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Labour. High school and college students across the province are looking forward to starting their summer jobs again this year. In some cases, this will be their first job experience. Minister, the parents of these young workers want to know that when their children go to work they will be safe.

Will the minister tell the parents and young workers what our government is doing to ensure that work environments are safe and healthy?

Hon. Brad Duguid: As a father myself, I can't imagine the pain and suffering that families must go through when a young worker goes off to the workplace in the morning and doesn't return in the evening. Workplace safety, in particular young worker safety, is a priority for this government. I'm sure that all members in this House remember the excitement of their first job, but what should be a productive and rewarding experience for young workers can often go very wrong, whether that be a workplace injury or, even worse, a fatality.

I have said several times that young workers are the most vulnerable workers in Ontario. It's worth repeating that they're at the highest risk in their first four weeks on the job. They're four times more likely to be injured in that first month on the job than they are at any time after that in their working careers. The WSIB is working very hard on an advertising campaign specifically geared toward young workers in this province, but we need—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: I commend the ministry and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board for the work they are doing to ensure Ontario's young workers have safe working environments.

Minister, it is heartbreaking to hear about tragic circumstances in the workplace, in particular when it comes to our young people, the very future of Ontario.

What is our government doing to ensure that young workers across Ontario return home safely every day after work?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The Ministry of Labour has implemented several initiatives over the years to improve the health and safety of young workers. Ministry inspectors pay special attention to the orientation, training and supervision given to young workers in the workplace. We've also created an innovative and youth-friendly website, WorkSmartOntario, to provide Ontario young workers with the information they need to be safe. Young worker health and safety information kits have been distributed to all members of this Legislature, so we have an opportunity as well to help out through our constituency offices to ensure that families across Ontario get the information they need.

We're also working in partnership with the Ministry of Education, where we've provided Live Safe! Work Smart! resources to classrooms across the province. I've spoken to teachers about this program. They're very enthusiastic about what it has to offer.

We're trying to build a culture of safety across this province. The best place to start is with our young workers. Through working with our young workers, in partnership with workplace safety associations across—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This is for the Minister of Health. In my riding, there is a family who has been trying to get treatment for their 17-year-old son. Daniel has a mental health illness. Daniel's parents have been told that Daniel will not be accepted into any program across Ontario because the wait lists are so long. Daniel will be turning 18 before an opening even becomes available. This family has nowhere to go. They're looking for treatment for their son when none is available. What will you do to ensure that Daniel and other adolescents like him receive the treatment they deserve?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I'm pretty sure, based on the information she's offered in the question, that this would normally be a question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Of course, she's not here. I'd like to take the question under advisement.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the member about absences.

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

I think the honourable member has a piece of casework that I would be very happy to undertake with her and see what benefit we might be able to offer to a family in trouble.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You've been the minister for five years. Daniel's parents are looking for compassion. They're looking for a solution for their son, not this endless bouncing back and forth between ministries. Will the minister agree to review this situation and report back to me on what can be done to assist Daniel and his family now?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's a little bit disappointing that the honourable member asked the question and didn't listen to the answer, because in the answer I offered exactly what the honourable member asked for by way of supplementary: To work on this as a matter of casework, to see it as one individual circumstance, to offer whatever support we can to a family in need. That's the commitment that we've made.

Our government has been committed to the expansion of mental health services, and the evidence abounds all through the budgets of my ministry and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I daresay, to remind the honourable member, that for 12 years in this province, eight of them under her party while in government, there was not one penny of increase for community-based mental health services. We've reversed that trend. That's why I have confidence that, working with the honourable member, we'll be able to find some relief for this family, who undoubtedly is experiencing very challenging circumstances.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm doing this because it's for a page's family. We'd like to welcome Dr. MacPherson and his wife, Nancy Steele, from Orillia. They're here for the third time. This is their third grandchild who's here as a page, and they're welcome, on behalf of page Evelyn, in the west members' gallery.

PETITIONS

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: "Whereas sections 48.9 and 48.10 of the Vital Statistics Act currently protect the privacy of adopted survivors of child abuse who are put up for adoption after being taken from severely abusive birth parents; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's Bill 12 will take away this protection and mandate the Registrar General to hand over the adoptive identity of these victims to their abusive parents once the child turns 19; and

"Whereas the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has said, 'The provincial government should

not legally mandate the release of identifying information of victims of violence to the perpetrators of those violent acts'; and

"Whereas the Ontario Victims' Bill of Rights declares that the victim should be treated with respect for their personal dignity and privacy; and

"Whereas these victims are often adopted in family groups, so that when one sibling reaches 19, there may be younger siblings who could also be affected by contact with the abusive birth parents; and

"Whereas no-contact notices have not been in existence in other provinces for long enough to be truly tested;

"We, the undersigned, demand that the McGuinty government and the Minister of Community and Social Services stand up for the safety and well-being of these severely abused individuals and reinstate a one-way disclosure veto to be filed by the children's aid society so that their abusive birth parents cannot find out the victim's adopted name without their permission."

I've signed that petition.

1150

COLORECTAL CANCER

Mr. Peter Kormos: I've got a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care doesn't fund the drug Avastin despite Health Canada's 2005 approval of Avastin for the treatment of colorectal cancer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Immediately fund the drug Avastin."

Signed by hundreds of parties, with my signature as well.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is in co-operation with the member from Eglinton–Lawrence when he introduced Bill 56. So this is in conjunction. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles, and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I agree with this petition 100%.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its rightful place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I'm pleased to present this to Bilaal from Richmond Hill.

HOME CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: This is from the SEIU and the people of Rockland, Prescott–Russell, Ottawa and Cornwall.

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;..."

They ask the Ontario government:

"(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and will send it with page Cali.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas part-time college workers in Ontario have been waiting for 30 years for bargaining rights; and

"Whereas thousands of part-time college workers have signed OPSEU cards, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board failed to order a timely representation vote; and

"Whereas the Ontario government must immediately make good on its promise to extend bargaining rights to college part-timers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The McGuinty government must immediately pass legislation legalizing the rights of college part-timers to organize, and direct the colleges to immediately recognize OPSEU as the bargaining agent for part-time college workers."

I affix my signature and give it to page Matthew.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition sent to me by Donna Hutton of Markdale, Chapman's Ice Cream in Markdale, the Bank of Montreal in Markdale, Dundalk Daisy Mart, and also Peek Thru My Window, a store in Markdale.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services, Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

"Whereas the community of Markdale has been promised a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner."

I've also signed this.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas crack houses, brothels and other persistent problem properties undermine a neighbourhood by generating public disorder, fear and insecurity; and

"Whereas current solutions—enforcement measures based on current criminal, civil and bylaws are slow, expensive, cumbersome and not always successful; and

"Whereas safer communities and neighbourhoods (SCAN) legislation is provincial, civil law which counters the negative impact on neighbourhoods of entrenched drug, prostitution or illegal liquor sales based out of homes and businesses and is being successfully utilized in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and the Yukon; and

"Whereas the following have endorsed SCAN legislation: city of Ottawa, city of Kingston, city of Hamilton, federation of Ontario municipalities, Ottawa Police Service, Ottawa Police Services Board, Ottawa Centre MPP Yasir Naqvi, Ottawa Neighbourhood Watch executive committee, Concerned Citizens for Safer Neighbourhoods, Eastern Ontario Landlord Organization, Friends and Tenants of Ottawa Community Housing, Hintonburg Community Association, Somerset Street Chinatown BIA, Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa and the Dalhousie Community Association;

"Be it resolved that we, the undersigned, urge the province of Ontario to enact safer communities and neighbourhood (SCAN) legislation in Ontario for the benefit of our neighbourhoods and communities."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature. I send it to you by way of page Evelyn.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank members of Knox Presbyterian Church in Alliston for sending this petition to me.

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I agree with this petition and I've signed it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health

centre would negatively impact on the quality care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I affix my signature to that and pass it to Sheilagh.

HIGHWAY 35

Ms. Laurie Scott: "Highway 35 Four-Laning

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas modern highways are economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been planning the expansion of Highway 35; and

"Whereas Highway 35 provides an important economic link in the overall transportation system—carrying commuter, commercial and high tourist volumes to and from the Kawartha Lakes area and Haliburton;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government move swiftly to complete the four-laning of Highway 35 after the completion of the final public consultation."

I agree with this and sign my signature to it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have another petition today from the good citizens of the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I agree with this petition and will give it to page Peter.

ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition from the ATV drivers in Wiarton.

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas the Highway Traffic Act, Ontario regulation 316/03, operation of off-road vehicles on highways, reads under part I, 'Definitions,'

"'(d) is designed to carry a driver only and no passengers;'

"We request the change of (d) to read as follows:

"'is designed to carry a driver and passenger if the all-terrain vehicle has been a manufactured design to carry a passenger.'"

I've also signed this.

HIGHWAY 138

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas provincial Highway 138 is one of the province's only two-lane roadways within the region and provides the main connection from the international bridge at Cornwall through Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry to Highway 401 and Highway 417. Speed and traffic volumes are of particular concern and may have been contributing factors in numerous collisions and fatalities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To urgently consider measures that will address the serious public safety and traffic hazard concerns on provincial Highway 138."

I shall send this to the clerks' table.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have another petition that's sent to me by the Burns Presbyterian Church in Feversham, Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I've signed this and given it to Evelyn.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas, the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government—it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

I will affix my signature to that and pass that to Sheilagh, again.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): For the three members who are in the House, the time for petitions has expired.

This House is recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1205 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FUSION YOUTH CENTRE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I am pleased to rise today to recognize the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, which has now been successfully helping Ingersoll's youth for two years. On Thursday, May 8, they will be celebrating this accomplishment and National Youth Week with a community open house, and I want to add my congratulations to those of the community.

The vision was to create a "leading youth service facility where youth want to be." With 680 youth members and up to 120 of them using the centre daily, I believe they are succeeding. The centre offers a safe location for youth to build skills, from sewing to rebuilding computers, and to access many resources such as a media lab, the Internet and a gymnasium. Up next are the completion of the community arts program and a recording studio.

In addition, the Fusion Youth Centre has brought together services for youth in one location. The centre gives access to employment counselling and job training, an OPP liaison officer, Oxford Child and Youth Centre and the children's aid society of Oxford county.

I want to commend the CAO, James Timlin, Mayor Holbrough and the Ingersoll council for their leadership in investing in youth through this centre. After two years, it is clear that the Fusion Youth Centre is contributing to a bright future for our youth and is an example for other communities to follow.

I want to thank the Fusion Youth Centre, Jason Smith, his staff and the many volunteers for everything they have given to the community and our youth, and I want to wish them all the best in the upcoming year.

SAINT BERNADETTE

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise in the House today to join the congregation of St. Bernadette's Roman Catholic Church in Ajax, my home parish, on the 150th anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady appearing to St. Bernadette at Lourdes.

This occasion is a year-long religious celebration that is being marked not only by St. Bernadette's in Ajax, but by all Catholic churches around the world that share the names Lourdes, Massabielle or St. Bernadette's. Once a month, my parish of St. Bernadette's in Ajax is marking this religious time with activities such as prayer services, masses, the movie about St. Bernadette, church lunches and dinners.

I would like to extend my best wishes to the pastor, Father Jim Bussanich, and associate pastors Father Steven Szakaczki and Father Joseph Lam Tran. I would also like to recognize the efforts of Father Jim for organizing these events through many dedicated parishioners such as Betty Bujold and others.

St. Bernadette's was honoured recently with the presence of Archbishop Thomas Collins, and will be further blessed with the visit from Auxiliary Bishop Hundt in December for a year-end closing mass.

COMMUNITY LIVING WORKERS

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Today I am here to speak on behalf of the non-unionized developmental workers who were promised by this government a pay increase over 10 months ago. In my riding, non-unionized workers with Community Living Owen Sound and District are still waiting on the Ministry of Community and Social Services to deliver on the promised wages.

As you know, Community Living workers are advocates for people who have intellectual disabilities. They provide their clients with the opportunities to live and participate effectively in society.

During July 2007, unionized workers with a number of Community Living organizations across the province went on strike. The Ministry of Community and Social Services told negotiators to deal with the situation quickly. To end the strike, it was agreed that the striking employees would be paid an extra $2.60 per hour over a three-year period. The same increase was also promised to non-unionized workers. But according to Community Living Owen Sound and District, they're still waiting for their fair share.

The non-unionized Community Living workers have asked the ministry to respond to their many inquiries, but have been given no clear answer. What is most discouraging about the situation is that the management of those Community Living organizations who chose to strike received a wage increase over three years, like their employees, while non-unionized developmental workers throughout the rest of Ontario providing the same services have been denied the same opportunity.

Will the responsible minister please deliver on her promise to the non-unionized Community Living workers, or is this just another Liberal broken promise?

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: There are hundreds of thousands of people in this province who are poor. Some of them live on ODSP allowance, some on Ontario Works, some work for minimum wage or less, and some of them work for less than minimum wage if they work for agencies. Poverty is widespread, and if we can believe Statistics Canada, which I do, it is getting worse.

I've had the terrible experience this week of trying to find out the government's agenda on poverty. I was in Peterborough yesterday, and I have to tell you, there was a disgraceful display in Peterborough where two senior citizens, one 76 years old and one 80, were literally picked up and shoved out the door by people operating on behalf of this government. They were ushered out and they were refused to even be told who was doing the pushing and the shoving. The people identified themselves as police officers but would not give identification. I doubt very much they were police.

Today I saw the same thing again: the police circling to make sure that the poor could not get in to the meeting to meet the minister. On both occasions, people were treated abysmally, and I, as a member of this House, felt I was too, because I was not allowed inside either of those locations, but Liberal members who showed up were. I don't know what this government intends to do but, really, I think it is a disgrace what has happened today.

HEART DEFIBRILLATORS

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in this House today to speak of a wonderful event that I attended last Friday at the YMCA in London, announcing four new defibrillators for the YMCAs in London and Strathroy. This was a joint announcement with the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the YMCA of Western Ontario, the Frank Cowan Foundation, Middlesex County Emergency Services and the Ontario Minister of Health Promotion.

I would like to take this time to thank our Premier and the government of Ontario for their ongoing support provided to that HSFO initiative to distribute 100 AEDs in Ontario.

Heart disease touches every family in Ontario and Canada. It accounts for more deaths of Canadians than any other disease. The latest stats report says that 74,626 deaths in Canada were caused by heart disease. I think it's a very important initiative to protect lives, and that's why our government is committed to support many different organizations across the province of Ontario, to display those machines. I saw them myself; I got trained on them. I think it's a very good initiative and I wish everyone in this House would visit a location that has those machines in order to see them. It's important to all of us to commend the government and the Minister of Health Promotion for this initiative.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The Central West Local Health Integration Network, or LHIN, serves Etobicoke, Brampton, Caledon and Dufferin. The Central West LHIN has the lowest level of per capita funding for mental health services when compared to all other LHINs. Even more troubling is the fact that resources for mental health services in Dufferin and Caledon are the lowest across Ontario.

Lack of access to mental health services has an impact throughout Dufferin and Caledon. Headwaters Health Care Centre does not have a designated mental health bed, yet they are forced to care for acute mental health patients because they cannot access mental health beds within or outside of the Central West LHIN.

As I highlighted in my question to the minister this morning, accessing mental health beds for adolescents is even more difficult. I have heard from many constituents who cannot get access to service. Once young people reach the age of 18, there are even fewer care options available. For example, there are not enough support programs for either patients or families dealing with mental illness.

Two years after the release of the Central West LHIN's integrated health services plan, the LHIN hosted a series of forums throughout Dufferin and Caledon. Rather than more consultations, my community needs action. The government needs to provide the residents of Dufferin–Caledon with their fair share of funding for mental health services now.

SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

Mr. Kuldip Kular: It's a pleasure to rise before my colleagues to speak to the month of May as South Asian Heritage Month.

Minister Chan spoke to the House in April to recount the legacy of those of the South Asian region who have settled in Ontario and throughout Canada. Their work to make this great country, already among the most diverse and prosperous in the world, an even greater one continues through their activity as families, communities, professionals, tradesmen and businesspeople.

Canada's 2006 census revealed that there are some 1.26 million South Asians living in this vast country, a country I am proud to call my home. My own region of Ontario is home to one of our largest South Asian communities, as they continue to recognize in this land the promise of prosperity and security and continue to raise their families here.

1510

South Asians are among the most industrious of Canada's peoples. One need only look to the great city of Toronto and its sprawling suburbs, even to my own riding of Bramalea–Gore–Malton, to bear witness to this fact. Indeed, many of this nation's most recognizable symbols—its railways, its industries and Canada's dynamic communities—are owed in part to the labour and vision of South Asians.

It is with immense pride as a legislator, South Asian and Canadian citizen that I encourage my fellow Ontarians, established and newcomers alike, to consider throughout this month the achievements of these remarkable people.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: This week is Emergency Preparedness Week right across Canada. Emergency Management Ontario, in partnership with Public Safety Canada and other provinces, is marking the 13th anniversary of this important week.

The theme of this year's national campaign is "72 hours—is your family prepared?" It is meant to encourage Canadians to be ready to cope on their own for at least the first 72 hours of an emergency. By doing this, first responders can then focus their energy on those who are most in need.

I'm pleased to say that this government's emergency preparedness management legislation is one of the most comprehensive in North America. Further, the provincial emergency operations centre monitors events inside and outside Ontario to make sure that we have 24-hour coverage, seven days a week.

Ontario families can also do their part by preparing an emergency kit with important items such as water, food, a flashlight and batteries and a first aid kit. Families should also prepare and practise an emergency plan that outlines information including safe exits from your home and neighbourhood, and meeting places to reunite with family and friends. This is especially important in rural and northern areas where isolation can further complicate an emergency plan.

I encourage all Ontarians to take in Emergency Preparedness Week and learn more about how to be prepared.

POVERTY

Mr. Dave Levac: There is no question that our economy is facing some tough, challenging times right now, and my riding is not immune.

We are contending with a serious economic slowdown in the US, the high cost of oil, a high dollar, emerging world competition and non-level trade practices. However, it is in these times that the measured, key investments in the people of Ontario are more important than ever.

We are helping families with low incomes reach higher with a wide array of initiatives. Since we took office in 2003, we have increased social assistance by 9%, not cut it by 21%. We are investing again in new affordable housing and rent supplements, not cutting them. We're doubling the funding for the student nutrition program. We are investing $135 million over three years for a dental plan for kids. There are more programs that, when put together, tackle the issue of poverty. But we all agree that more can be done.

Unlike the Conservatives, who had a record of freezing the minimum wage for nine years, we have raised it five times and will continue to increase it responsibly.

Unlike the NDP, who voted against the Ontario child benefit and against raising social assistance rates, we firmly believe that these measures will be helpful to our families that need it the most.

The McGuinty government will not turn its back on the people of this province. We believe that a balance must be found.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments, dated May 6, 2008, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 107(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROVINCIAL ANIMAL WELFARE ACT, 2008

LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2008 SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE DES ANIMAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 5, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 50, An Act to

amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm pleased to address this bill on behalf of New Democrats, and I'm excited by the presence of so many legislators in this Parliament, with this new sitting schedule. I witness a sea of green: the empty chairs in the government ranks.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It is contrary to the standing orders to refer to either the absence or the presence of individual members.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member for the point of order, but I do remind him that the standing orders refer to individual members.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Did the member from Mississauga–Streetsville get beat up a lot in high school? Is this what motivates him, during debates, to want to get involved in other people's comment-making?

I want to tell you about the member for Willowdale, Mr. Zimmer, whom I like. I've admired him since he was first elected here, in not the most recent but the provincial election before that, and I've enjoyed working with him. He's been a parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General.

I recall how pleased I was when he introduced legislation that dealt with the offence of speeding in a motorboat and made sure that the same consequences applied to a conviction for drunk driving in a motorboat as applied to drunk driving in a motor vehicle. I was pleased to see his bill advance, as a private member's bill, to become law, because it was good policy.

I was also very excited for the member for Willowdale, Mr. Zimmer, when he introduced his Bill 154, An Act to regulate zoos. Like other members, I was inundated with e-mails and letters from people, not just across Ontario but across Canada and throughout North America, supporting the member for Willowdale's bill that regulated these roadside zoos, private zoos. We're all familiar with them. I in fact recall sitting as NDP House leader in House leaders' meetings, urging the then House leader Jim Bradley to assist Mr. Zimmer in advancing his bill through to third reading, because I told him the New Democrats would support Bill 154, An Act to regulate zoos. I was as disappointed as, I'm sure, Mr. Zimmer was when he wasn't successful in getting the Premier's office to accept his proposition, his act to regulate zoos.

I remember the pre-election promise of then-Solicitor General, Minister of Community Safety Kwinter, when he announced that there was going to be legislation and implied that it was going to regulate roadside zoos. I was proud that Mr. Zimmer—he's a Liberal; I'm not. That doesn't in any way restrict or inhibit my respect and regard for him and my best wishes for him in his career and in his riding. Indeed, I was optimistic, I was hopeful that he'd be elected in his riding. I knew a New Democrat wasn't going to win that riding and that Mr. Zimmer would, as he has, serve his constituents well. So I was happy when, in the government press release of August 31, 2007—you know something's coming, don't you? I was happy when, on August 31, 2007, Mr. Zimmer's comments were included in a press release issued by the Minister of Community Safety, the Solicitor General. Mr. Zimmer, responding to the minister's announcement, said, "I'm very happy with our government's action on the issue of roadside zoos."

1520

Mr. Zimmer believed the Solicitor General on August 31, 2007, when the Solicitor General announced there was going to be legislation regulating roadside zoos, presumably legislation somewhat akin to his Bill 154. Indeed, not only was Mr. Zimmer pleased, but the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums was pleased as well. Bill Peters said, "The Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums is delighted that Ontario is committed to moving ahead with tough new legislation and standards that will fix the roadside zoo problem."

Not only was Mr. Peters from the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums enthusiastic about the promise to regulate roadside zoos, as Mr. Zimmer had proposed in his Bill 154, but Melissa Tkachyk was excited too. She spoke highly of the government's announced intention to regulate roadside zoos. All those people who had lobbied Premier McGuinty's office, calling for the passage of Mr. Zimmer's Bill 154, An Act to regulate zoos, felt that their wishes were being give effect to. I remember the day that Bill 50—that's the bill we're debating today—was introduced for first reading, and I recall thanking Mr. Zimmer for his commitment to regulation of roadside zoos and even speaking with him afterwards. I said, "David"—that's what I call Mr. Zimmer when we're speaking privately—"you appear to have won a battle with your Premier's office and it appears that your work on the regulation of roadside zoos is finally coming to fruition." I know you can't answer, Speaker, but perhaps you could nod or shake your head if the answer is in the affirmative or the negative, but I think you were pleased for Mr. Zimmer too.

Imagine my disappointment, my shock, my dismay when I discovered that there's no reference to roadside zoos whatsoever in Bill 50. Was this some sort of hoax? Was it some sort of cruel joke? Or was it simply Mr. Zimmer getting the shaft?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Yes.

Mr. John O'Toole: Absolutely.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Hudak responds. Mr. O'Toole responds.

I thought, "Surely there is a mistake. Mr. Zimmer is one of the brightest members in the Liberal caucus and one of the most capable." Well, he is.

Mr. Tim Hudak: He should be in cabinet.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I agree. Mr. Zimmer is a lawyer with substantial experience in an adjudicative role. I've worked with him on any number of committees when he's been the PA to the Attorney General, and his intellect is beyond reproach, one of the best intellects in this chamber. I can name right off the top at least half a dozen cabinet ministers who pale in comparison to Mr. Zimmer. I don't expect you to be telepathic, but I think

you can read my mind. You can arrive at that list as readily as anybody else could.

Why would they do this to Mr. Zimmer from Willowdale? Why, when the member for Willowdale worked so hard on the regulation of private zoos; why, when there was so much support for that proposition from across North America—and don't think for a minute that the Premier's office didn't know about it; why would they—the government, Mr. McGuinty—let Mr. Zimmer run as a Liberal candidate in that October election, thinking that his regulation of roadside zoos was going to become law? It simply wasn't the case and never was and, as long as it's only but Bill 50, never will be. Shame on all of you for doing that to a colleague. Shame on you for embarrassing one of your better members. Shame on you for holding out false promise to those people who believed you when you said you were going to regulate roadside zoos. Shame on all of you.

I wouldn't blame Mr. Zimmer a bit if he didn't show up at all for the next three and a half years. I can't begin to imagine the embarrassment that he feels in his riding. I want to tell the residents of Willowdale that it was no fault of Mr. Zimmer's. I want to tell the residents of Willowdale that their member fought the good fight and that the people of Willowdale shouldn't be angry with Mr. Zimmer; they should be angry with Mr. McGuinty, because it's Mr. McGuinty who betrayed them.

All those people across North America who sent e-mails to every member of this chamber and to the Premier's office: You've been had. You've been taken to the cleaners. You've been sent out to hang and dry, and all of your wishes for the regulation and licensing of roadside zoos—and let's understand: We don't need laws and legislation to regulate good people, we don't need regulation of roadside zoos to regulate the responsible operators of these things; we need them to regulate the bad apples, the bad players, the MarineLands of the world.

There's no regulation of private roadside zoos, private zoos. I am truly saddened by that. I'm saddened by that because I was enthusiastic in my support for Mr. Zimmer's Bill 154, and I'm saddened because so many people have been let down.

Bill 50's going to pass. One of the remarkable things during the course of the debate of this bill—and New Democrats are going to vote for Bill 50. I'm going to tell you some stuff, though, about section 6—you know that's coming—because we have real concerns about some nasty work hidden away in the bowels, the entrails of this bill. You know what I find remarkable? People who can stand up in this chamber and get teary-eyed discussing animal welfare but who have far less time talking about kids and poverty in this province.

Don't get me wrong: I'm an animal liker. I like animals. To paraphrase a colleague, I suspect I like them more than I like most people. I like animals. I always had animals as a kid and until a few years ago.

1530

Just the other day I was talking to you about Cheech, Bruce and Charlotte's dog next door. Folks here have heard about Charlie; that was my old beagle. He's gone on to where old beagles go. Well, they die; that's what happens. Charlie's dead. He's so dead he couldn't be deader. While he was alive he was a darn good dog, but he was a beagle. As a matter of fact, I bought Charlie from a beagle breeder up near Highway 6, in the Puslinch area. There's a lot of dog breeders and trainers there, aren't there? Delightful folks.

I've got to tell you that I found it remarkable that as a part of that August 31, 2007, press release by the then-Solicitor General, there was also an announcement of funding. This one sneaked through. You might like this one. Again, I tell you, it's how cockeyed this government's priorities can be. On August 31, 2007, the Solicitor General announced $80,000 in funding for temporary housing for pets of women fleeing domestic violence.

I'm not pulling your leg. There was an announcement of $80,000 for emergency housing for the pets of women fleeing domestic violence. The suggestion was that women stay in violent households because they're fearful of leaving their pets behind—nothing about their children. My colleague's jaw just dropped—I heard it hit the ground—the member for London–Fanshawe. I share his amazement.

The McGuinty Liberals announced immediate funding for emergency housing for pets of battered women. What a trivialization of a very serious subject. Tell me, has the funding flowed? Has there been accommodation of the pets of abused women as a result of this $80,000 in funding?

If you listen to my colleagues—the women's critic, Andrea Horwath, the member from Hamilton Centre; Cheri DiNovo from Parkdale–High Park—to any one of us talk about the plight of women in our own communities who can't access emergency housing or second-stage housing, even more importantly—you heard us talk a couple of weeks ago about Noellee Mowatt, a young woman who was getting beaten up and called the cops, and they put her in jail instead of the guy who was pounding on her. Remember that?

So, you've got a government that sends beaten women to jail. I'm talking about a beaten woman, the innocent victim. We know that the beatings are deadly. She gets sent to jail and the government calls this some sort of get-tough policy on domestic violence. And then we have a government that announces $80,000 in funding for emergency shelter for the pets of battered women. The announcement actually says it's because we know that battered women don't leave violent households out of fear for their pets.

Horsefeathers. I've never heard such unadulterated bullspit in this chamber before in my life. There are a whole lot of reasons why women are held imprisoned in violent households, and it's got to do with things like the lack of emergency shelter, the lack of second-stage housing, the lack of adequate supports for unemployed people who are forced to apply to Ontario Works or even ODSP. Good God. To suggest that a woman in Ontario stays in a household being beaten because she is worried

for the goldfish or the budgie is just plain stupid and an insult. It's just an incredible denial of the reality and the seriousness of the ongoing epidemic of domestic and spousal violence.

I have a good relationship with the humane society down in Welland and other humane societies across the Niagara region and beyond, including the one here in Toronto. I go back to when I was practising law, many, many, many years ago now. Ah, I was young; I was thin. I had colour in my hair; I had lots of it. Back then, the head of the local humane society, Bernie Webb, a man for whom I have the greatest of regard—he and I did a fair number of trials together. He was prosecuting. He most recently worked, like more than a few other people did here, with local humane societies when we had the pit bull ban legislation, because the humane societies, as you know, had some interesting things to say about that.

For the life of me, somebody get up on their feet and explain what in Hades section 6 is doing in this bill. "No corporation or other entity, other than the Society or an affiliated society"—that's the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the one with, what, the 50% kill rate? If I'm wrong by one or two percentage points, I apologize in advance. Maybe it's only a 48% kill rate; maybe it's 52%.

"No corporation or other entity, other than the Society or an affiliated society, shall,

"(a) hold itself out as being the Society ... "—well, that's not rocket science, as the cooking guy says, is it?—"or"—this is the kicker:

"use the name 'humane society' ... alone or in combination with any other word, name, initial or description."

What is the motivation here? What is the government doing? May I, for a minute, be cynical and suspicious? May I?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Trust the government.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, Mr. Ramal says you can trust the government. I want to remind you of the world's three greatest lies: "Your money cheerfully refunded," "Your cheque is in the mail," and, "Hi. I'm from the government and I'm here to help you." I'm sorry, but generations of Ontarians and Canadians have learned in the hardest way that you can't trust the government. Please, let's not be so naive and presumptuous as to try to pretend or say to Ontarians that they can trust the government.

People trusted the government in August 2007, when the Solicitor General stated that he was going to introduce legislation to regulate zoos. Whoops. That trust, she's gone. Because I'm afraid Mr. Zimmer's bill, Bill 154, the one that would regulate zoos, is nowhere to be seen in Bill 50.

1540

Shall I go on? I've only got an hour. If we're going to spend time talking about breaches of trust by this government, we're talking filibuster time, and the rules simply don't allow that anymore, do they, Speaker? It's like Mr. Baird and his rule changes, or, as we have now, the most recent rule changes by this government House leader.

Why would section 6 be in this legislation? Why would this government want to effectively shut down the Toronto Humane Society with its century-plus history of looking out for the welfare of animals? Century-plus. You see, the existing legislation already has a cut-off point: 1955. What it did was preserve the right of any animal welfare organization that identified itself as a humane society to ensure that it could continue to be able to call itself a humane society, but no new associations.

Folks might recall that there has been more than a little bit of tension from time to time between the OSPCA, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of the Cruelty to Animals, and the Toronto Humane Society, which has a euthanasia rate of, I think, 6%. They take great pride in not slaughtering the animals that they rescue. Again, if somebody has different data, come forward with it; we'd all be pleased to hear it.

I know that this is of great concern. Tim Trow, for whom I have a great deal of regard and for whom I have a whole lot of time, wrote on April 29 to the minister. May I, Speaker? Will you indulge me by letting me ensure that the contents of this letter are on the record? It's only fair, isn't it? It's an important part of this debate.

"April 29, 2008....

"Dear Minister Bartolucci:

"We write to ask you to remove section 6 from Bill 50. Section 6 provides that community-built shelters that either don't want to be affiliates of the Ontario SPCA, or shelters that the Ontario SPCA itself does not want as affiliates, will be stripped automatically of their names by the Legislature.

"Historically in Ontario, the many voices of the province's animal welfare movement have been its strength. If the result of Bill 50 is but one voice, Bill 50 will have stifled debate and diversity and will have weakened what has been built up in communities over generations.

"Bill 50's role for the Ontario SPCA appears to be one of insurmountable conflict of interest because the Ontario SPCA will become both regulator and fundraising competitor to its 32 affiliates.

"In addition, Ontario's animal welfare movement is wider than the Ontario SPCA or its affiliates. Bill 50 will instantly, upon enactment, strip the names and identities of other charities amongst the 235 Ontario animal protection charities registered with the Canada Revenue Agency.

"Bill 50 provides for no decision-making process and no appeal to the courts. It provides no explanation as to why it is necessary for the Legislature to take away the identities of any charities.

"Sanctions against holding out or infringing a corporate name already exist in Ontario law. In the case of the Toronto Humane Society, there could be no confusion because there is no similarity between 'the Toronto Humane Society' and the 'Ontario SPCA.'

"The Toronto Humane Society is a well-known Ontario landmark, a hospital and a shelter, caring for both

wild and domestic animals. We employ 150 caregivers, and, at any time, 500 volunteers provide recuperative or palliative care as foster parents, feed orphan kittens in the nursery, groom cats, or walk dogs.

"We serve province-wide, one-third of our clients coming to us from far beyond our Toronto area.

"The Toronto Humane Society has grown and prospered since 1887 because of the generous support of financial contributors and members. We do not receive, and have never received, government funding or funding from the Ontario SPCA." Hmm.

"Our name is how we have been identified for 121 years. It has been entrusted to us by successive provincial governments and it represents the goodwill and trust of generations.

"Our name is how we speak to supporters and donors, and it is how they identify us in their wills or in other giving. It is how volunteers and animal caregivers find us and it is how clients access our services—rescuing animals, re-uniting lost animals, saving injured wildlife, providing veterinary care, extending shelter and providing homes.

"Take away our name and identity and you jeopardize our ability to provide essential animal care to citizens when they are desperate and in need.

"Please remove section 6 from Bill 50.

"Thank you.

"Yours truly,

"Tim Trow, president" of the Toronto Humane Society.

This has been one of the hottest little subjects of e-mail in this province for a good chunk of time now. Well, not a good chunk of time; just since we've begun second reading debate on Bill 50. This is just an example. This is illustrative of the types of e-mails and communications that members in this chamber have been getting since this nasty little bit of work in section 6 of Bill 50 has been exposed.

Here's a letter to NDP leader Howard Hampton, an e-mail:

"Dear Howie"—so familiar, but "Howie" doesn't mind—"I support animal welfare societies amongst other charities. I learned today that Bill 50 is going to debate on May 5. I'm e-mailing you to exhort you to expunge s. 6 of the proposed PAW act which would divest those animal welfare agencies across the province not affiliated with the Ontario SPCA of their charitable status and their names.

" ... as a private citizen, I see a government"—and put an ellipsis there, please, if Hansard will accommodate me: dot, dot, dot. Not because Hansard doesn't know what an ellipsis is, but I just want to make sure I'm not asking for anything inappropriate. Thank you, Hansard, for the ellipsis.

" ... as a private citizen, I see a government initiative which has the retrogressive effect of reducing diversity in the great, compassionate and dedicated group of animal welfare communities.... [I agree with] Tim Trow....

"There are other problems with the bill as well which include the absence of protection for lost pets used in laboratories, no protection for millions of farm animals, or animals in the wild. These issues will have to be addressed. In the present, I ask you not to support s. 6 of Bill 50."

Well, I can tell that correspondent, that Ontario resident—she's from Ottawa, by the way. She could be in the Premier's riding. And I'm not sure—far be it from me to predict how people are going to vote. Trust me, far be it from me to predict how people are going to vote. I'm still waiting for that long-overdue conversation with John Tory about October 10, because I had made predictions and I was proven entirely wrong. I have every intention of continuing to hold him to account. Mr. Murdoch might agree with me. But this woman in Ottawa could be living right there in the Premier's riding, and I just get the feeling—because there are some things that people are concerned about but that are not vote determiners. But the passion in her e-mail is such—similar to the passion in almost all the other communiqués around section 6 and this attack on the Toronto Humane Society and other stand-alone humane societies—that I've got a feeling, I've got a distinct feeling, that this voter is highly unlikely to ever vote for a Premier who continues to keep section 6 in Bill 50.

On behalf of New Democrats, I want to make it very, very clear: We will be seeking to delete the reference to "humane society" from section 6. Indeed, we will suggest that paragraph (b) of section 6 be deleted in its entirety, because the OSPCA has an at law monopoly on the word "OSPCA." We believe that section 10 of the existing legislation should be allowed to prevail.

1550

You know that I don't tend to be anthropomorphic. But, having said that—and look, I confess I'm not a cat person; I'm a dog person. But my neighbour Ms. Rosie has cats. She has Charlotte and Bruce on the one side and they have Cheech, the dog. Ms. Rosie is a delightful woman. I love her dearly, her husband is great, they're wonderful friends of mine and I'm just so lucky to have them as neighbours. But Ms. Rosie, well—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: "How many?" somebody interjected.

I promise to stop reporting it at three. Ms. Rosie, like other cat owners, knows there is a regrettable stigma that is unfairly applied to cat lovers and to feline fanciers once they exceed that somehow very arbitrary number of three. What she's done is—this is remarkable—she's been a little humane society of her own. The cats that she has—three, maybe more—are all semi-feral. That suits me just fine because they don't tend to rub up against your leg when you're sitting out on the patio. They keep their distance. They won't take food from your hand, but if you lay it out for them they'll come and get it.

Ms. Rosie, my neighbour, spent a fortune at the Main West Animal Hospital because all these cats get neutered and spayed, they get the teeth cleanings, the grooming

and the clipping. They're incredibly kempt cats, and they're a delight to have in the neighbourhood. I've got to tell you this: no mice; no problem with mice at all. You could leave a basement window open all summer and you're not going to have to worry about finding a mouse in the basement. The cats are remarkably territorial. I've learned a great deal about cats. I'm hard-pressed even to tell one from another. There was a one-legged one—no; a one-legged cat would be remarkable. There was a three-legged cat, which was not called Lucky, I can tell you that. But one of them is called Road Warrior. He's the one with the tattered ear and the one blind eye. He's got all his legs. When you're called Road Warrior, man, oh man, you need all four legs.

I've acquired an understanding of cats that I never, ever thought I'd have. I'm not a cat person. Dogs: Listen, I think dogs are great. Dogs are just the neatest sort of things to have, especially when they come into the living room with muddy paws or they do the butt-end scrape across the carpet. It's just a delight. Who could ask for anything more pleasant than just these wonderful dog ownership moments? Dogs are amazingly faithful, and I've been lucky. I've had two dogs. My first dog was Smack. Smack, unfortunately, was tied up in the yard—this was quite a few years ago; I was only a teenager—somebody came into the yard and Smack bit him, which is what the dog is supposed to do, in my view, when somebody comes into the yard and they're uninvited. Nonetheless, Smack had to be escorted out of town because he faced some criminal consequences.

The humane society was out on Merritt Island at the time, and some friends and I went down there. I said I wanted to see my dog—because he was locked up. I remember my friends distracted the staff—I was only 17—and we busted Smack out. I said, "Run, Smack, run," and we got away. Smack lived out the rest of his life with Dave and Vicky Wiwcharyk up in St. Davids, until one day, in his elderly years, he decided to not only chase a tractor—St. Davids is rural country; it's fruit-growing country—but to grab hold of the rear tire and not let go. It was one of those big tractor tires, about six feet high. Smack just didn't survive the tractor tire.

Charlie died. He lived a full life. I do have to mention Joanne—St. Joanne—another neighbour, who cared for Charlie far more than I did. Charlie would acknowledge my return home and then want back outdoors because he knew Joanne was coming to take him over to her place and pamper him. Charlie cost me a whole pile of money in vet fees too, because Joanne believed in exploratory surgery—so did the vet, interestingly, at $1,000 a pop. It's amazing, isn't it, how enthusiastic vets can be about exploratory surgery when you're prepared to write the cheque every three months? "Well, let's have another look inside Charlie." It got to the point where I'd wait 60 days before I paid it, because I figured the dog better live at least 60 days or else they're not getting the money.

It's imperative that this bill go to committee, and in fact it's already been the subject matter of discussion at House leaders' meetings. I suspect that this bill may well require a committee to sit during the summer break, because you've got some real concerns about section 6. You've got some tension, because you have fears from people in the agricultural community that this bill may be overreaching and inhibit even best practices when it comes to the agricultural community.

I find it interesting that the bill exempts, effectively, farmers by virtue of—this is the language that's used—"activities carried on in accordance with reasonable and generally accepted practices of agricultural animal care, management or husbandry." I'm not sure that some sharp-eyed lawyer, in a moment of heightened petti-foggery, may not distort that language and achieve a result that isn't intended. I think that all people will want to ensure that farmers, people in the agricultural business, if you can dare call it that in Ontario today—it's hard to call a losing proposition a business, isn't it?

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Come on. When farmers' spouses are subsidizing the production of livestock and food, it's called negative income. So I'm not sure that farmers would mind if I didn't refer to them as being in business. Farmers are farmers because they love it. Farmers are farmers because they were the second or third or fourth generation of farmers.

1600

Then there are farmers who don't farm anymore, like the peach producers and the pear producers down in Niagara, because the McGuinty government turned its back on the only fruit processing plant east of the Rocky Mountains in this whole great country. It not only eliminated the hundreds of jobs at CanGro, but will be, at the end of the day—mark my words: When the intense pressure exists to pave over some of that scarce agricultural land, the tombstone can bear the name of Dalton McGuinty.

There's concern from people in the agricultural community. Ms. DiNovo, the member for Parkdale–High Park, raised this yesterday. She talked about the now-notorious Ontario case of the—what do they call themselves?—gentlemen farmers. There was a lawyer who owned a farm and who kept dozens of horses on it—dead. The concern—

Hon. John Wilkinson: Speaker, what bill are we on?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The minister doesn't know what bill we're on. I can tell him that we're on Bill 50. For Pete's sake, Minister. I understand how a government backbencher's mind would drift once in a while, but with the big salaries that ministers are getting, you expect them to know what's going on in the Legislature on any given day. The bill we're debating is the one that his government House leader called: Bill 50. So when I've got to listen to the Minister of Research and Innovation ask, "What bill are we on?" I wonder whether these early morning starts are maybe just a bit much for him. It may be that he's doing some nodding off mid-afternoon. I just wonder. Here's a minister of the crown saying "God, Speaker, what bill are we debating?" My goodness. Surely he should know.

Ms. DiNovo, the member from Parkdale–High Park, expressed what I think is a very legitimate concern. It's not to say that there's no legislation that addresses that, but we have to be very clear. Are farmers exempt? I think not. Farmers are very much covered; let's be clear about that. But it's six of one, half a dozen of the other; it's neither fish nor fowl. Yet, at the same time, we want to make sure that animals, like horses in a farm context, are protected from abusive treatment that is in no way consistent with good farming practice or legitimate farming practice.

The interesting thing—and this is what struck me, because here you get into the silliness of it all—is that the bill doesn't apply with respect to native wildlife and fish in the wild. Does that mean that we're going to tolerate any type of behaviour with respect to wildlife? I certainly hope not. I would think that one would want to have, however unlikely the enforceability is, some understanding of the fact that there are legitimate hunters and anglers, nimrods amongst others, who do what they do in the course of hunting wildlife or in the course of angling, but I think we need some specificity in that regard.

New Democrats, I'm sure along with our Conservative counterparts in opposition, are going to make darn sure this bill goes to committee. We will not let it go to third reading until it has had committee hearings. New Democrats are being very clear that we will not support section 6. We stand with Tim Trow, the Toronto Humane Society and other humane societies that are not associated with the OSPCA, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I, for one, wonder what exactly prompted section 6 in the first place. Other members have already questioned whether there are Liberal friends on the board of directors of OSPCA. And please, OSPCA, before you start sending me e-mails, you explain how it is that this neat little attack on the Toronto Humane Society is part and parcel of this legislation.

I do, finally, want to once again commiserate with the member for Willowdale. I can't think of a crueller thing to do to one's own than set him up the way the McGuinty government has set up David Zimmer. Zimmer has carried some of the worst junk bills that the McGuinty government has ever produced.

It was Zimmer who ran with the pit bull ban, that ill-conceived bit of legislation, and who took all the flak—it was. And he did a darn good job. The Attorney General was nowhere to be seen. Here's the member for Willowdale, who, as PA, runs with the pit bull bill, and the government treats him like this?

Here's David Zimmer, once again—the Ontario Human Rights Commission demolition. It was Zimmer. You remember that. He did all the heavy lifting on the demolition of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Then, to add insult to injury, you remember how it was the member for Willowdale, Mr. Zimmer, as PA, who agreed to accommodate folks lined up for committee hearings, and then the Premier's office—what did you call those people in the Premier's office, Mr. Murdoch?

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have no idea; I don't remember. But the people in the Premier's office shut down Mr. Zimmer and the committee after Mr. Zimmer had put his reputation on the line in the course of serving his Premier.

I don't know about where you come from, but where I come from, we don't treat our friends that way. Down where I come from, if you're going to stab somebody, you do it up front. You don't stab them in the back. I think the poor member for Willowdale has a dotted line that says "Insert knife here" on the back of all of his suits. Well, think about it. You laugh, but how would you feel?

How would Mr. Murdoch feel if his leader did that to him? How would Mr. Murdoch feel if Ernie Eves did that to him? Well, he wouldn't be pleased at all, and I tell you, there'd be payback. If Ernie Eves did that to Bill Murdoch, Bill Murdoch would make Ernie Eves pay the price. And do you know what? I respect Bill Murdoch for it. Bill Murdoch, whom I also happen to like, didn't sneak around behind anybody's back. He's a person of honour, a darn good MPP, and I have a great deal of respect for him. He represents the people in his community in an admirable and exemplary way.

I didn't want to do anything as tacky as passing around a card that we could all sign for Mr. Zimmer, because I like David a great deal.

This isn't just about a betrayal of one member; it's the betrayal of all the people who thought the government was going to introduce legislation regulating private zoos. There's nothing in Bill 50 about regulating private zoos. Go figure. So I'd suggest to folks who bought the bill of goods that was being peddled by the government back on August 31, 2007—I'd suggest that folks like Bill Peters, national director of CAZA, Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and Melissa Tkachyk, programs officer with the World Society for the Protection of Animals, mobilize their members and get those faxes and e-mails working on the Premier's office, telling the Premier that he didn't deliver once again, that he failed them.

1610

I, like others, read Peter Worthington's column on the issue of Bill 50 and the attack on the Toronto Humane Society by this government, the acknowledgment that the regulator is also the fundraiser if section 6 of this bill is enacted. Worthington notes:

"A spokesperson for Bartolucci says the controversial wording in Bill 50 is mere 'modernizing of the language and not intended to change the existing situation.' The intent is to have better control over cruelty and abuse of animals, and not to prevent people caring for animals." Then what the heck do you need section 6 for?

Worthington, who's worthy of our considering his comments, is not a dumb guy by any stretch of the imagination; he's been around a whole lot. Worthington said:

"If the ministry believes this, it doesn't understand the issue.

"To avoid a snakepit of future controversy, before the next reading of Bill 50, the words 'humane society' should be removed from the sentence that says the OSPCA has sole disposition of who can use that name.

"It's ludicrous, when one thinks about it. Both the OSPCA and Hamilton have abandoned the 'humane society' identification for themselves, but want to prevent any except those affiliated with them from using it.

"Bartolucci is to be commended for updating the act, but he should familiarize himself with the OSPCA's turmoiled history, and that in the past it has proved unreliable in dealing judiciously with power."

New Democrats are eager to see this bill go to a vote so it can get on to committee today. I think the committee is going to have some considerable work to do, and it would only be fair that they get around to doing it. The parliamentary assistant for the Attorney General, who has monitored the debate of this bill—and he's to be applauded for doing that—is going to be squiring this bill through the committee process and has been present throughout the debate—and he's to be admired for that. I'm sure that David Levac, the member for Brant, will prove himself worthy of status far beyond mere parliamentary assistant by virtue of his handling of this bill, but I would ask the parliamentary assistant from Brantford to perhaps, in a private moment, away from other colleagues, perhaps over a soda pop after we've left at 6 o'clock—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: He's a soda pop drinker; he's a temperance man. I'm not sure it has served him well, but he's a temperance man, and I admire him for that. But I'm not sure that Mr. Zimmer is. So maybe after 6 o'clock, the parliamentary assistant might take Mr. Zimmer aside to some entertainment establishment down the road here, buy him a soda pop and explain to him how he, Mr. Zimmer, could have been so thoroughly betrayed by Premier McGuinty, by Bill 50, and how all of the goals of Bill 154, An Act to regulate zoos, introduced by Mr. Zimmer, have been abandoned, forgotten, deserted, left behind in the dust.

I'm looking forward to this bill being in committee. I look forward to the input from members of the public and I encourage people who have any interest in this, whether from the agricultural perspective, from the animal welfare perspective, from the zoo perspective, to apply promptly to get standing before that committee. New Democrats will do everything we can so that all who are interested are accommodated and heard from.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I've been listening for almost an hour to the member from Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It was a whole hour.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Yes, a whole hour. It was entertaining, for sure. I also was listening to the minister when he introduced this bill, plus I was listening to the member for Brant, who is the parliamentary assistant to the minister, when he spoke in detail about the importance of this bill. No doubt about it, our colleague from Willowdale was the inspiration behind this bill and he convinced the government and many people across the province, maybe across North America, of the importance of protecting the animals in our society.

As you know, many of us have animals in our homes and many of us treat animals with respect and look after them very well, because as you know, animals cannot express their feelings and cannot protect themselves. It is our responsibility, as human beings with the ability to control animals and protect them, to look after them very well. That's why this bill came, as a protection mechanism.

As you know, this act has not been touched since 1919, a long, long time ago. Life has changed and so many issues and also so many aspects of our lives have changed. I think it's about time to open this act and look after and protect animals.

I want to commend the minister and the government for introducing this bill in order to create a protection mechanism for the animals in our society, because so many people abuse animals, take advantage of animals. They kill them, abuse them, don't feed them, put them in small areas. It's like the story of Tyson in my riding of London–Fanshawe. Tyson the kangaroo was put in a small box for a long time. As you know, kangaroos like to jump, like to go, like to move around. I think it was cruel, and many people from my riding came and told me about this animal. That's why I'm supporting this bill.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: First, I'd just like to congratulate the government on their new rules. It certainly has enhanced the membership in here during the day. I can see it really brought a lot more people in to listen.

We're here to talk about the member for Welland and his great speech that they say he had for an hour—excellent. He talked about many different things. But I have some concerns about this bill and, as he mentioned, a lot of trust has to be given to the government in passing a bill like this, because we don't know the regulations, and we are especially concerned on the farms. One of the things that causes distress—I'm telling you, a lot of members over there wouldn't understand, but there are certain things we have to do as farmers that I'm sure would cause them distress.

Mr. John O'Toole: Give an example.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Well, you have to castrate your animals, and I'm sure that's going to cause a bit of distress. There are horns you have to take off certain animals, and there's a lot of distress when you take those horns off, and there's blood.

Interjection: Tails.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: No, we don't take tails off; that's one thing we don't do.

Mr. Toby Barrett: You take them off sheep.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Sheep, yes, you do; that's right. So things like that will cause distress in animals.

Interjection: Why do they do those things?

Mr. Bill Murdoch: They have to be done. There are certain things—the member is a bit of an urban fellow,

but he does have a few rural people. He wants to know why we do some of those things. We may explain that at a different time.

When I was listening yesterday, the member for Brant went on about protecting our cute and cuddly animals, our pets. Well, that's fine, and I agree with him that we have to do things like that. But with a bill like this, you've got to be so careful, and there's a lot of trust. And you know something? People out there don't trust this government. How could you trust them with all the different things that they've done, that they haven't lived up to?

I have great difficulty in supporting this bill. Yes, I want to protect animals—nothing wrong with that. But if you're on the farm, it's going to be tough to support this bill as it sits now.

1620

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I listened intently to the comments made by my colleague the member from Welland–Thorold, and I thought he touched on pretty well most sections of the legislation and spoke to some of the issues at hand. As he said, we as New Democrats support generally where this legislation is going. We believe that it is high time we moved towards the protection of animals in a way that is in keeping with where we should be at this point in Ontario. He does make the point, and I heard him talk about it earlier that it's unfortunate that people sometimes have higher concerns for this issue than others—not that animals are not important, but sometimes it is a bit frustrating when you do look at it. I'll talk about that a little bit later.

I've just got to say a couple of quick things. One is, everybody was waiting for roadside zoo legislation. I almost got that one wrong. That was a Freudian slip. In the end, the legislation does some of that—

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, it doesn't. There's no regulation of roadside zoos.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There's no regulation, but there is an attempt in the legislation to deal with it.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm going to have to go back and read the legislation, because I was under a totally different impression. I'll go back. I'll stay with my first comment, then. It was supposed to be roadside zoo legislation and it ain't here, I'm being told by our critic. I've got to believe what he says is the case, although I thought from an earlier conversation that it said otherwise. But that's something else.

The government has decided to go a different route. I think that roadside zoo legislation is needed. It's something that needs to be dealt with. The whole issue—and I heard Cheri DiNovo speak to this yesterday—is that we understand that farmers take good care of animals they have because it's their livelihood, but there needs to be some sort of mechanism in the case where that doesn't happen. There have been cases—a lawyer who owned some 50 horses and starved them to death. You have to have legislation to get at that kind of stuff. But I'll have a chance later in debate to talk about where I'm at.

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to tell the member from Timmins–James Bay that I think he really got it right the first time, because the words "roadside zoo" might not appear but the powers and the expertise that are going to be needed to inspect those zoos on animal care and to prevent cruelty are in the bill. It's going to happen. It has been committed in the bill, if the bill is passed.

The gentleman from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who tends to purport to say what I said in the debate, I ask and challenge to go to Hansard and say where I said "cute and cuddly." As a matter of fact, I would also challenge him to understand that farms being exempted brings me to the point I want to make that the member from Welland brought up that implied that there wasn't—but there is, in terms of the different ministries out there that have different enforcement agencies responsible for animals on a farm and are responsible for wildlife as well through the MNR. He knows that.

The second thing is the intent of the bill in section 6, which might need some work in committee. I have said that before and I'll say it again: That's why we are going to committee, which other governments tended to avoid quite a bit. We're going to be moving into that discussion. But it was designed specifically to avoid the bogus scam artists who were using any kind of name that would imply that they are with that humane society, including the good work that the Toronto Humane Society does do for the prevention of cruelty to animals, so that no one else could pull a scam on people's heartstrings who do want to take care of our animals. That bill needs some work, and we were going to talk about it in committee. That's the commitment we made when we said that from the beginning. The minister said that we would look at this in committee, and that's going to happen.

I agree with the member from Welland, who tells us, inside his stories, which were rather fascinating, that there is an important part of the bill that needs to be discussed, and that's to ensure that all of the stakeholders, including the various ministries, have an opportunity to give us input, which we are looking forward to in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Welland, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I appreciate the candor of the parliamentary assistant. I suggest that perhaps Bill Murdoch might have misunderstood, or maybe the parliamentary assistant was speaking of Bill Murdoch as being cute and cuddly, although from my perspective, he's many things but neither of those. He may have more intimate relationships with people who don't share my view, and I understand that.

To the parliamentary assistant, through you, Speaker: I understand what his job is. I also understand that the parliamentary assistant didn't write the bill. He doesn't have to accept responsibility for its shortcomings. He isn't the one who shafted Mr. Zimmer, the member for Willowdale. I didn't ask him to apologize to Mr.

Zimmer; that's for the Premier to do. But it's only for the parliamentary assistant to take Mr. Zimmer out for a soda pop after work and perhaps explain to him how this could have happened—if, in fact, he knows.

These things come out of the Premier's office. We know that. It's the brain trust in the Premier's office that produces this stuff and that signs off on it. That should be of some concern, because what little bill was it that Garfield Dunlop and I were in there with, that sex offender registry bill? It was about two pages long and the government had to move 14 amendments in committee. Lord love a duck, it was an amazing exercise in flawed draftsmanship. So the brain trust in the Premier's office fumbled that ball. They fouled that one up.

And, please, to the PA: We're friends still, aren't we? I say to the PA, let's just make this the bill it should be. Work with me, not against me. That's all I'm asking of you. There are some things to be dealt with here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to participate in the debate on this bill. I will be addressing four key areas of the bill that I have some concern with, and I believe my colleagues in the official opposition do as well. One of them, of course, relates to this famous section 6, which has already been referred to in debate. It's an issue with which I have personally had a great deal of contact, with constituents e-mailing, calling, sending me letters and appealing to me as their representative to advocate for an amendment to the bill that would remove that section. I want to speak to that.

I also will speak to other areas of the legislation that, quite frankly, cause concern. On the surface, perhaps not; but when we consider the implications and potential abuse of those sections, I think we as legislators have a responsibility to deal with them.

One of those areas is the right to enter premises without warrant, really conferring upon agents the same powers as police officers. I am not sure that the government fully thought their way through that one, and so I want to speak to that.

The third area is the right to seizure of property without warrant. Once again, I'm concerned that we're conferring upon agents of the society, as it's put in this legislation, powers that are, first of all unnecessary for the purpose of the intent of the legislation; and second, to just even provide an opportunity for abuse of power. I think that in that regard, this legislation is going too far.

My final point is a section of this bill that could be used—euthanization made simple, which is a serious concern to me.

I'll deal with those four areas in my remarks. But before I do that, I want to speak to another bill, the consequences of a bill. The reason I bring this into debate is that all too often, this government has presented the Legislature with a bill that, in intent, can be supported by all of us, and the purpose, as set out even in explanatory notes, has certain benefits that I think we could all embrace. It's when you get down to the details of the legislation that we as legislators have a responsibility to analyze and to draw the government's attention to those areas where there may well be unintended consequences, certainly imperfections, in the legislation.

1630

I want to just draw our attention back to another piece of legislation presented here, namely, the famous pit bull legislation brought in by the Attorney General of this government. We warned the government at the time that, first of all, the Attorney General himself couldn't pick out a pit bull in a lineup if he was asked to do that. There was so much generality in that legislation that we knew there was going to be a challenge and that there would be unintended consequences as a result of that bill.

Which brings me to the specific issue I want to bring to the attention of my colleagues here, and it's the case of Rambo. You may well be familiar with this. Rambo is a dog, a much-beloved pet of a young lady by the name of Gabriela Nowakowska. Because of the legislation brought in by the Attorney General of this government, Rambo is now separated from Gabriela, and there's actually a lawsuit—a lawsuit—under way in this province. Gabriela has had to retain counsel so that, hopefully, she can be reunited with her pet.

I wrote a letter to the Attorney General on behalf of Gabriela. I'm going to read it into the record, because I want others to know just how ridiculous some of the legislation is, and the unintended consequences, that poorly drafted legislation—perhaps sometimes with the best of intentions—can cause distress.

My letter to the Attorney General reads as follows:

"I am writing on behalf of the teachers and students of Armitage Village Public School in Newmarket, who have contacted me regarding the plight of 'Rambo.' Rambo is currently impounded at the Mississauga Animal Services awaiting the outcome of a court challenge with respect to the provisions of Bill 132.

"Under this legislation, what defines a 'pit bull' is given wide latitude, with the burden of proof resting with the owner in each case. In Rambo's case, it is now well-established that he is not a purebred American Staffordshire. Under the regulations of Bill 132, Rambo also lacks any of the characteristic menacing qualities of Staffordshire Terriers or related breeds.

"Rambo's owner, Gabriela Nowakowska, loves her pet and is enduring great personal distress and suffering at being separated from him. She is also enduring the hurtful stress of a court challenge which could result in her losing her pet companion forever."

I appeal to the Attorney General to, for goodness' sake, use his ministerial power and order the release of this pet, knowing full well that it's his legislation that's causing this kind of confusion. What we're into is yet another one of those pieces of legislation that on the surface sounds good to many people, but is causing an equal amount of distress already—and we're not even at committee yet.

I want to read into the record some of the notes I've received from my constituents. The first one is from

Catherine Burgess of Newmarket, Ontario: "As a supporter of the Toronto Humane Society, I support their concern about section 6 of Bill 50. Section 6 of Bill 50 should be removed."

From Patricia Hatton: "Remove section 6 from Bill 50. Do the right thing for your constituents and the animals. I want to know how you vote. Thank you in advance.

"Patricia Hatton...."

She will know how I vote. The way I will vote on this is—I fully support the intent of the bill when it comes to the protection of animals. What I will vote against are the wrong-headed aspects of this bill that will have unintended consequences. The minister and the parliamentary assistant can give us all of the assurances that they want here, but as long as we have a legislative framework that allows for a misinterpretation, that allows for those who—by the way, when the parliamentary assistant and the minister are long gone from government, and some of us hope that's sooner than later, there will be others who will interpret the legislation, and all of their best intentions may not be followed through on. So we're saying, let's fix it now. Don't allow the legislation to be implemented as faulty legislation. Let's get it right, let's take it to committee, and let's put forward the appropriate amendments. And one of the amendments that I, as the member representing Patricia Hatton and others who have written me—I will be voting to remove that section to bring clarity to the bill to ensure that the intent, as noted in the explanatory notes, is in fact followed through on in the actual legislation.

I have another letter here, from Eva Klos: "Remove section 6 from Bill 50—this is extremely important."

Doreen Miller: "I am writing to you with the hope that you will please do something to help with the removal of" section 6 from Bill 50. "Please support the humane society and the animal welfare movement in Ontario by removing section 6 ... before it's too late.

"Thank you on behalf of the animals who have no voice."

Vivian Ho writes: "I am writing to urge the removal of section 6 from Bill 50. The risk for the 235 Ontario animal protection charities to lose their name—a name that has meant goodwill and trust—just because of the breakage of their affiliation with one single organization, the OSPCA, is an insurmountable conflict of interest for the reason that the OSPCA will become regulator and fundraising competitor to its affiliates. Moreover, the OSPCA has a poor record with saving animals, and always needs money. Furthermore, the OSPCA has always operated secretly and won't tell how many animals it adopts and how many it kills. From the statistics, roughly 50% of animals were killed in the pound and a far cry from the Toronto Humane Society's 6%.

"Please do the right thing, remove section 6 from Bill 50!...

"Vivian Ho...."

I have many others like it.

To my constituents, I will simply say, yes, I agree with their reasoning. I think it is inappropriate. I'm not certain what the intent was when this section was allowed to appear in this legislation, but I will certainly do what I can to ensure that it's removed.

I want to move on to the new section 11.4 of this bill, which authorizes inspectors and agents to enter, without a warrant, places used for animal exhibit, entertainment, boarding, hire or sale in order to determine if the animal's care meets the prescribed standards. The parliamentary assistant earlier indicated, "Oh, yes. This legislation will in fact deal with roadside zoos." No doubt he's referring to this section that empowers agents to enter these facilities. My question to the parliamentary assistant, to the minister, to the government, is this: Why without warrant? Why the overkill in this legislation? If there is a suspicion that something inordinate is going on in these places, then simply get the warrant, make your case and enter the premises. That's all.

1640

We're not living in some foreign Third World country; this is Ontario. This is a place where we fully expect that our privacy rights, our property rights, our personal rights, will be respected. To now introduce legislation under the guise of protecting animals—we're taking rights away from human beings.

I'm sorry; I can't support it. I don't know how any right-thinking member of this Legislature can support that. So I will argue vehemently in committee, and here in this place, and ask the minister to reconsider this section of the legislation.

I want to refer as well to the new section 12.1. Here's what it does: It "authorizes inspectors, agents and veterinarians who are lawfully in any building or place to take and conduct tests and analyses on samples of substances and carcasses; it also authorizes inspectors and agents who are lawfully in any building or place to seize any thing presented to them or in plain view that they have reasonable grounds to believe will afford evidence of an offence or needs to be removed to prevent further offences."

"Anything." It's the wording of this legislation that causes me great concern—that they believe on "reasonable grounds." It's one thing, on the one hand, to give agents the authorization without warrant to enter someone's premises. Then, on top of that, you're going to say, "Take whatever you want. Remove it." Where is the responsibility that we expect from those individuals who are authorized to carry out inspections? I'm suggesting that it's not here. There is a problem. There's an overstepping of bounds. I feel very uncomfortable in supporting legislation that will do that.

I want to make reference to the current subsection 14(2) and the changes that are being proposed there. The current subsection 14(2) of the act sets out the circumstances in which the society may destroy an animal. The current clause 14(2)(b) requires a written statement by a veterinarian that "the animal is ill or injured and is incapable of being cured or healed without suffering."

Those are conditions that I think we would all agree are reasonable. It requires a stating of fact and a justification for the euthanasia. However, this legislation amends that section "so that the veterinarian's written statement is now required to state only that destruction of the animal is the most humane course of action." Euthanasia made simple.

I thought this was to protect animals. I thought that this legislation was there to provide some additional protection. What it's doing is now simply making the paperwork a lot easier. If you want to put an animal down, you simply say, "That's the most humane thing that can happen." I'm sorry; I'm simply not prepared to accept that.

The parliamentary assistant or the minister may argue, "We're going to trust the veterinarians." I don't think the veterinarians want that responsibility either. I think what they want is to know that they can operate within a specific framework that allows them to conduct their business in a professional way.

There are a number of areas in this legislation that should give us cause for concern. That's what the committee is for. That's why we have public hearings. I look forward to that. I look forward to stakeholders coming forward and expressing their concern to the government.

I will take the parliamentary assistant at his word, and that is that perhaps for the first time in something in the order of five years now the McGuinty government will actually allow the public hearing process and the standing committee to function as it was intended to function; that when amendments are brought forward, not just by the government but by the opposition members of that standing committee as well, they are considered seriously; that the vote that takes place in that committee will take place based on what the members of that committee feel is in the best interest of enhancing the legislation before us; that the vote won't be whipped, that members will actually be given the latitude and the respect to vote on those amendments as they believe is right.

We'll be watching. I'll be looking for the kind of direction that the parliamentary assistant gives the members on that committee when those amendments come forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yet again I want to say, at the beginning of this, that New Democrats will be supporting this bill to second reading. We understand that there are issues that need to be dealt with in committee. I thought the member—I forget the riding name; the Conservative member—raised some interesting points about some of the issues that he saw. I read through the legislation and I'm not sure I came to quite the same conclusion, but I understand his argument. I think for that reason this type of legislation really needs to get off to committee.

He is right—and I was right in the first place—that this bill doesn't deal with roadside zoo legislation, as was promised by this government to certain people. Yes, it deals with being able to inspect animals that are being cared for by roadside zoos, so that inspectors can go in and verify if the animal is being mistreated. But the whole regulatory issue that has to be dealt with around what a roadside zoo is—how is it to operate? what are some of the rules of the game?—in order to make sure that we have a standard when it comes to providing roadside zoo events or attractions to people in Ontario, has not been dealt with in this legislation. I think one of the things that we're going to hear at committee is a wish to insert within this legislation sections of the bill that could more properly deal with roadside zoo issues.

I know that the industry and those who have been lobbying for roadside zoo legislation were promised, first, that they would get their own legislation. Then they were told, no, there'll be more of an omnibus bill—that is, I suppose, Bill 50—and it would be contained within that. But as I read it, many of the issues that I've been brought up to speed on by people who have come into my office aren't dealt with.

I'll get a chance a little bit later in debate to talk about some of the issues, such as section 6 of the act, that I think sorely need to be dealt with.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is always a pleasure to follow the erudite debate from my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora, and especially to be able to pass comment on it.

When was the last time that legislation protecting animals was reviewed? It was the same era as the time in which women were considered property. World War I had just ended. It's been that long since we've reviewed how we treat animals in Ontario. That gives you an idea, I think, of the scope and the sweep of this particular bill.

It's a very ambitious bill. It's a bill that brings the protection of animals into the 21st century. If passed, this legislation is going to have no impact at all on the vast majority of Ontarians who treat animals with kindness and respect and concern, who treat animals as if they were part of their family, if they're pets. But it would allow the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to take action effectively against those who don't.

1650

I can recall, back in the 1980s, taking a ride on my bicycle, and I remember going on a very, very hot day in July into a field and seeing a number of dogs chained in the sun. I was just horrified at this. I went home and called the police. I went up with a cruiser. The officer looked at it and he said, "I can't cross that line." I said, "But you can see that these animals are very clearly in distress." And he said, "Yes, I can, but I can't cross that line." We eventually did get it sorted out when the owner came out and the officer persuaded him to take the animals in. But this is the kind of bill that in its very many reforms would enable the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to do exactly the types of things that the children in the classrooms and the schools that I visit in Mississauga say really need to be done, and that's why I will support it.

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's a pleasure to comment for a couple of minutes on remarks made by my colleague the very capable member from Newmarket–Aurora. He did

an eloquent job as usual, and as usual his remarks were factual.

He mentioned Rambo, and I think of Rambo all the time because I have a constituent, Lori Gray from Alliston, who's a member of the Dog Legislation Council of Canada, and she and I worked very, very closely during the pit bull debate, which was legislation that I think was just more grandstanding—as the member from Newmarket–Aurora alluded to that legislation—and probably didn't get to the real problem out there, that being that some people don't treat their animals very well. Most people do.

The member talked about the fact that Rambo's owner had to hire a lawyer in order to try and get access, visiting rights, while Rambo sits on death row. It turns out that Rambo is not even a certified pit bull. The Attorney General at the time the pit bull legislation was brought in was Mr. Bryant, and as the honourable member for Newmarket–Aurora mentioned, he couldn't even identify a pit bull in a lineup of dogs. I argued then and will always argue that it's bad pet owners, irresponsible pet owners, that frankly should be hung out to dry, and not the animal itself. People shouldn't be training their dogs to be mean. They shouldn't be abusing their animals, nor should they be siccing them on the neighbour. They should be responsible.

The honourable member mentioned warrantless entries, and I'll have a chance this afternoon to talk about that. That is a real worry. It's certainly always a worry for the Progressive Conservative Party. I can remember being in cabinet and having a number of bills where bureaucrats wanted to put in warrantless entries, and we just wouldn't do it. We wouldn't do it as a matter of principle. You never know when you'll get a cranky neighbour that just wants to make a false complaint and all of a sudden you've got the Ontario Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals rummaging through your house and taking whatever they want. I think—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments.

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to assure the member from Newmarket–Aurora that I was paying attention, and I have been paying attention to the member from Welland in the two-minuters that are going on and taking seriously the role that I have been asked to play here in shepherding and discussing the bill in the House and in committee. I take it very seriously, as I do all the business that we're asked to do in this place. The commitment I make to him is that the deputants that come will be listened to clearly and we will be listening carefully to the opposition. We will be listening to the concerns that are being raised in the House, and we are going to get them looked at. We are going to review them. The minister has made the commitment that he's going to listen carefully to the arguments that are put forth to us to make the best bill that we can in terms of the protection of and the prevention of cruelty to animals.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment—given the member from Welland's stories, and I know that you shared a few—with my own pet, Taz. If I don't mention him, my kids will be upset. Taz is an absolutely beautiful dog, a shepherd-lab mix, an outdoor dog that absolutely disdains being inside the house and is very rarely in the house but is cared for completely.

The member mentioned the concern that he has regarding giving too much authority to those individuals to take action. Under present legislation, there are a tremendous number of pets—dogs, cats, a large number of animals—that have died because the SPCA had their hands handcuffed and couldn't get access fast enough to protect those animals. I gave examples of that in my original 10-minute speech when we introduced the bill. I understand his concern for the balance of how much authority is provided. We will listen carefully, we will respond and we hope we can write the best piece of legislation that needs an update.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Newmarket–Aurora has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank the members for Timmins–James Bay, Mississauga–Streetsville, Simcoe–Grey and Brant for their comments.

I will take the parliamentary assistant's word that this will be a meaningful next step in the legislative process. I will also be looking for the minister to take the parliamentary assistant's attitude to heart and give the parliamentary assistant the latitude to do what he has committed to do here, because ultimately it is the minister's responsibility.

We all, I believe, have common ground in this place in terms of what the intent is. We want to ensure that animals have the protection they need, as my colleague from Simcoe–Grey indicated, from people who should rightfully have consequences for their mistreatment of animals. We will be the first to say that those consequences should be there and that there needs to be the appropriate amount of authority to deal with those who would abuse animals.

But bringing it back again to the issue before us in terms of the concerns I expressed, we would be looking for the balance that is so important in terms of the authority, the power that is given, so that we don't move from animal abuse to abuse of power, for which I think we inherently have a concern regarding this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm so pleased to be here among the multitude of members who have gathered in the Legislature this afternoon, and the hundreds of people sitting in the gallery—oh, a few people sitting in the gallery this afternoon. It's a little bit sad the way this place has gone since the new schedule. There seems to be less interest in this place than there normally is, but I suppose for the government that's a good thing. The least amount of attention we have in the Legislature is always better for a government; the least amount of scrutiny of the government is always better for them—and the ability to control the message. So I understand where the government is at. I understand what they're up to.

Today we're talking about roadside zoo legislation—oh, no, it's not roadside zoo legislation; I forgot. We're speaking about legislation to protect animals from cruelty.

I just want to say a few things on this particular bill in the time that I have. The first thing is that, like you and all of us here in this Legislature, we've been approached by many people over the last number of years about the need to regulate roadside zoos. I was, along with others, expecting that legislation would be brought forward this spring in order to deal with the regulation of roadside zoos. Unfortunately, only part of this has been done by way of this legislation. We're dealing with the ability for either the Society for the prevention of cruelty to animals or somebody else they would name, such as a municipality or others, to go in and inspect that the animals are not being cruelly dealt with as far as their treatment. But we don't have in this legislation some of the issues that need to be dealt with when it comes to the regulatory side of the industry.

There are some really good operators in the industry who are doing a great job; we all know them. Many of them are in our ridings. But every now and then you get an operator who is maybe not as—how would you say?—good as they need to be as far as how they run their operation. It's not just a question that the animals are sometimes mistreated, but, quite frankly, that the public is not provided the type of experience they should be getting in such a facility. It will be interesting when we go to committee if others in the industry will be coming to us to talk about this and how they feel about what needs to be done and was not done in this legislation. So that's the first thing that I want to say.

1700

The second thing I want to get at—this is a bit of a motherhood-and-apple-pie kind of issue, because all of us here in the Legislature at one time or another, I would think, have had a pet in their home—a dog, a cat, a budgie, whatever it might be. Many of us know that the pet becomes an extension of the family.

Our family is no different. We have Misty the dog. Misty is a black lab retriever. She runs the household. She has been with us now for five or six years. Both my wife and I enjoy her company, and we think she enjoys our company. At least, she wags her tail every time I come home every four days, after the Legislature, and she gets excited. So I think that she's okay with me—

Mr. Peter Kormos: I hope that's your dog you're talking about.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's my dog, Peter, that I'm talking about. You know Murielle; she's always excited to see me.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Yeah, sure. I do know Murielle.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Exactly. Thanks a lot, Mr. Colleague.

Anyway, I want to say that it's a bit of a motherhood-and-apple-pie issue, because most of us understand that pets in our lives are a really nurturing thing, a very positive thing, and a great—

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a funny story to tell about your dog.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I wish I could tell that story about the previous dog. It passed away because it was 15 or 16 years old. It died of eating too many greasy foods, as my good friend Mr. Kormos knows.

It's one of these issues that's motherhood and apple pie. Everybody understands that pets are important to our lives and that we should respect pets in some sort of humane way, that we're not mistreating them. Unfortunately, there are people in our society who, for whatever reason—and we've seen it in the papers and we've heard about it in our communities—have done some pretty cruel things to animals, and we need legislation to deal with that.

Does this legislation do that? Partly. But it doesn't go to the extent that some in the communities who are interested in animals and cruelty to animals would like us to go. For example, and for good reason, the government has not extended the power of the person who is going to be responsible for going to investigate what is going on when there is cruelty being reported to an animal. They won't have the ability to go into somebody's home. Of course, the search warrant is going to be the way to deal with that.

One of the issues is that most of the cruelty, unfortunately, doesn't happen necessarily at a roadside zoo or other type of organization or businesses. Unfortunately, it happens by way of individuals, and that's going to be much tougher to deal with. Why? We don't have the resources to do it.

Typically, there has been about $100,000 a year given to the OSPCA in order for them to do the work of trying to investigate when there has been a complaint about an animal that has been cruelly treated. We're now going to bring that funding up to $500,000. It sounds like there's a 500% increase, and that's such a great thing. But you know as well as I do, that's for the province of Ontario. Where are you going to go with 500,000 bucks when it comes to the ability of the OSPCA to do their job? What do they do if there's a complaint up in Rainy River? Do they have the ability to have somebody there to do that? What happens if it's in Cornwall, Sarnia, Toronto, Timmins or James Bay? The OSPCA is not going to have the ability to dispatch people to investigate in a timely manner, because 500,000 bucks won't even cover the city of Toronto, quite frankly.

The government is going to say, "But the OSPCA could work with the municipalities, because much of the enforcement actually is going to be done by municipalities." The city of Toronto—we call them dog catchers or animal control officers—or the city of Timmins, Sudbury, wherever it might be, will have authority under this act to act on behalf of the animal in order to check if cruelty has been, as you would say, administered to the animal.

Again, this is the downloading issue. We are saying to municipalities, "Here's some wonderful legislation. We're going to give you more authority to go out and to

inspect and to charge in the event that an animal is being treated cruelly." Good stuff, but where are the bucks? Where's the ability for the municipality to have the wherewithal financially to be able to enforce this legislation? Simply put, this is just more downloading.

I don't disagree that it's a good idea to give the municipalities that same power through the OSPCA. I think that's a great thing, but we need to make sure that municipalities have an ability to pay the people necessary to provide the services that have to be done under Bill 50. That's one of the things that I want to say. Every time I see legislation coming through here, far too often—somebody has a great idea. It normally starts by way of a private member's bill and then it's eventually adopted by way of a government bill. We stand here in this Legislature and pontificate about how great it is, what a great idea I or my colleagues have had, and how we'll stand together and pass great, wonderful legislation, but we never look at how much it is going to cost the municipality and those who are charged under the legislation to administer whatever we've done by way of law. Let's be clear: Should this bill pass second reading, and I assume it will, and should it pass third reading, and I hope it does, and be proclaimed into law, the municipality, along with the OSPCA, will have the ability to go out and do inspections in particular facilities where they think there has been cruelty to animals. But who, in the end, is going to pay? Is the OSPCA going to have to fundraise the remainder above the $500,000? Do they have the ability to do that? Can they? I don't know. That's a lot of money.

Oh, thank you very much, Dario. Much appreciated. I didn't even ask for that. This is how great the pages in this chamber are. They are just absolutely great pages. They could see that I would like a glass of water with a little bit—no, no. Just water was fine, thank you.

But I just want to say that it's going to be more downloading onto the municipality, and I think one of the issues that we need to look at when this bill goes to committee is what is going to be the cost to municipalities and what can be done to assist the municipalities and the OSPCA to be able to properly administer this law when it does become law. Otherwise, it's just more of the same: great laws that are passed that at the end of the day nobody can enforce. Why? Because we haven't got the personnel to go out and enforce them.

That's maybe where we're going to end up with this. We might end up in a situation where somebody calls the OSPCA centrally or calls their municipality and says, "The neighbour down the street is abusing the dog," or the cat, and the response is going to be, "Thank you very much for the call." Then nobody will be dispatched because the municipality or the OSPCA will not have the financial means to send somebody in to do the investigation—the inspection and then the investigation, I should say. And all of that leads to court, which means that, again, the municipality is going to be caught with the burden of having to take this into court, and who pays in the end?

So the province is really a great missing—how do you say that?—an absentee landlord when it comes to its fiduciary responsibility to municipalities to make something like this work. That's one issue I think we need to take a look at: Who is going to pay for this in the end?

The other thing that I want to talk to, and my colleague the member from Welland-Thorold, Mr. Kormos, I thought made the point quite well, and including the member from—I forget where it is. Mr. Klees. I'm sorry; I don't know the riding name, Speaker. Please humour me.

Interjection: Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The member for Newmarket–Aurora made the point as well, and that is the whole issue of section 6, I believe it is. Section 6 basically says—I'll just pull it out here very quickly. This is something that is going to be troubling to about 200 charities out there in the province of Ontario that deal with the whole issue of providing care to animals in the province. It says:

"No corporation or other entity, other than the society or an affiliated society, shall,

"(a) hold itself out as being the society or an affiliated society having authority under this act;"—I understand that for inspection purposes—"or

"(b) use the name 'humane society', 'society for the prevention of cruelty to animals' or 'spca' or the equivalent of any of those names in any other language, alone or in combination with any other word, name, initial or description."

The effect of that is to basically rename a whole bunch of associations that have been out there for a very long time; for example, the Toronto Humane Society. They've been around for, I don't know, 100 years? They have been very successful in providing services to people to adopt cats and dogs and other animals and to care for them. They have babysitting services. When there is a cat or a dog that's been mistreated or found as a stray on the street, often they end up with the humane society. Unfortunately, they are going to have to change their name. How do you fundraise when you have a seal or you have a brand or you have a stamp that everybody recognizes? So when somebody gets on the telephone, either telemarketing or directly from the Toronto Humane Society—and I just use them as an example; they are one of over 200—they are going to call and say, "Hi. I'm calling on behalf of the Toronto Humane Society." Well, you have a picture of what that means. "Oh, yes, I know. I got my cat there." As a matter of fact, Simba, the cat at my house, comes from the Toronto Humane Society. So I'm likely to give them money if they call me. Don't get my number—it's unlisted. That's a whole other story, telemarketers. My God, you get a whole bunch of calls from them. We need legislation on that sometime.

1710

But the point is, people have an image when they hear "Toronto Humane Society," and they're more apt to give a financial contribution because they know the good work that they do. If you, in this legislation, say, "I'm

forcing all these organizations to change their names so that you don't use the words 'humane society' within the title," it's going to have a financial effect on the organizations who are now doing the heavy lifting, as my good friend Mr. Kormos uses the line, to provide for the needs of animals not only in Toronto but across this province. So I do want to say that is one part of the legislation that I think needs to be looked at.

I want to take the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, with a bit of indulgence, to talk a little bit about a few people who I see are in the galleries here with us today, and that's Nancy and Bill Steele, whose son lives in the city of Timmins out at Kamiskotia Lake—my lake, where I live during the summer and seasonal. It's Kamiskotia. I see that their granddaughter, page—what's the first name again? Sorry—Evelyn is here, and she's so proud to be here as a page. She's here with her grandparents, but she's going to be going back to Kamiskotia Lake later on this summer, and I know that she wants to see Misty the dog because she heard about Misty here and to find, when she does come, that she likes the Milk-Bones. Bring those along.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the time in this debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate the opportunity. I too listened very carefully to the member from Timmins–James Bay and was looking forward to a few more minutes of breathtaking debate—Inside joke.

I want to respond to the concerns he expressed regarding the municipalities and the OSPCA's capacity to do the job that this Legislature, if passing this legislation, will have them do. Let me talk about what the OSPCA has told us. They've said that if these regulations come into effect, their efficiencies in terms of how they provide that function—they will have enough efficiencies to cover off any expected expense that's coming.

The second issue is that when you mention municipalities, you're talking about animal control officers versus the act, which is to deal specifically with cruelty. So when you put those two together in a package, that answers the concern that's being raised. Apparently, we're being told, it's not going to have an impact on a monetary basis on the municipality or the OSPCA. That's what we're told right now, and we'd like to talk about it further in committee. I would gladly enter into that discussion.

The second point I want to make, and I want to make again on some of the other conversations that have gone on, is, remember that this particular bill does not change any aspects of other ministries' capacities to do their enforcement. You're talking about wildlife protection and you're talking about animals being protected on farms. The same regulations that exist today will not be changed by this legislation. Therefore, I think that when we package this, we have to be seeing this in concert with other ministries, other enforcement agencies and our capacity to find the efficiencies that I expressed.

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's a pleasure to rise and comment on the brief remarks from the honourable member from Timmins–James Bay. He mentioned the cost to municipalities, and the parliamentary assistant said, "At this time we're being told that there won't be a policing cost to municipalities." It's clear in the legislation that the police are to enforce this new legislation, not just the Ontario Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals.

In my own municipality, this government is responsible for policing in the province. In Wasaga Beach, we're nine officers and one civilian short at this time. I've raised it several times in this Legislature. This will be more work. The member from Timmins–James Bay is absolutely right: This could even become quite a large caseload in some areas of the province, because we all love our pets. I grew up with a little mutt named Toby. She was just the most beautiful dog in the world. I can tell you, every time the furnace goes on in my parents' old house, we still think it's the dog and yet the dog has been dead for 30 years. So maybe Toby's ghost is around. I don't know how dogs know the time of day, but that dog would meet us kids getting off the school bus. She'd stay on the property all day, and then at about 3:30 she'd make her way up the street and sit right at the school bus stop and wait for us to get out every day. You sure miss the darned things.

This could become, as the honourable member said, quite a cost to municipalities. As usual, the government just can't continue to download things.

Section 10: He talked about the use of the name "humane society." That will be proprietary to only those animal welfare groups—some 245 in the province—that are affiliated with the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the OSPCA. I just don't understand why it's in there. I don't know enough about the long history of the feud between the Toronto Humane Society and the OSPCA, and I don't really want to know it all, but certainly this bill, as the honourable member said, needs to go to committee. Things like that—warrantless entry and other things—need to be considered.

Mr. Peter Kormos: In the midst of this, who is speaking out for the newly born reindeer at Toronto Zoo? Look, Councillor George Mammoliti—Giorgio, as he would prefer to be called—has no qualms about undressing in council chambers displaying his hirsute splendour because he's upset about people sunbathing nude, but he has said nothing about the slaughter of newly born male reindeer at the Toronto Zoo—outright slaughter—when there are appropriate farm locations and wilderness locations across Ontario eager to adopt these reindeer. I find that an incredibly objectionable thing. So, Mr. Mammoliti—as a junketer, Jean-Marc is but an apprentice—who junkets across the world, over and over and over again, at the taxpayers' tab, visiting zoo after zoo after zoo, professing his affection for these animals, has no trouble taking a newly born reindeer, trussing, I'm sure, its tiny legs as it howls in protest at being taken away from the mother's teat, and then holding it down while it delivers that lethal dosage of toxin. It's

happening right here in the city of Toronto, and George Mammoliti—he's the guy responsible for the zoo—has not had a word of protest about it. I find that reprehensible.

People should be telephoning Mayor Miller's office. People should be telephoning Councillor Mammolitis's office—e-mailing, faxing, condemning the slaughter of newly born male reindeer at Toronto Zoo.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll remind all members to confine their comments so as to at least make reference to the speech that they're replying to.

Questions and comments? The member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a pleasure to add my comments to those of my colleague from Timmins–James Bay.

I'd like to touch briefly on a couple of points that some of the members may have missed in the bill. One is that in return for the powers granted to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the key thing to remember is that the government has quadrupled the funding to the OSPCA since having taken office.

Some of the members have expressed reservations about allowing OSPCA agents to inspect premises. One of the members suggested that perhaps they could go into homes. Well, homes are one place they can't go. But the places that they can go are the ones where, right now, OSPCA inspectors and agents can hear the howls of animals being abused, can see the acts of abuse being taken, but somebody can stop them at the gate and say, "Sorry, pal. You can't go in here." After this, they can. After this, they can say, "We can. We can hear it, we can see it, and we know it's happening. We're coming in."

I think it was a year or two ago that this Legislature passed a measure making it mandatory for the reporting of gunshot wounds. We all supported it. In this bill, it becomes mandatory for a veterinarian to report animal abuse. If we can support the reporting of gunshot wounds to people, I don't see a problem in reporting what a trained, experienced veterinarian may know to be systematic abuse of an animal. All of the members have referred to the fact that they love their pets; we all love our pets. This bill gives veterinarians and the OSPCA the teeth to do something about it.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins–James Bay has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the member who just previously spoke—again, I don't remember the riding—I just would caution you that members of the opposition are supporting this legislation, and many of the assertions you made that we may not support some of those things I think were a bit over the top. What I heard from the Conservative caucus and certainly what you heard from the NDP caucus is that we think, yes, you need to move in this direction. But we are raising, I think, some valid points. The point is, it is a cost to municipalities, and if you're saying it's not—and I heard the former whip from Brantford say that it won't be—let's talk about that at committee, because I'm hearing differently from those who've contacted me.

The other issue of what happens to charitable organizations by the humane society—those are legitimate concerns. What I heard the previous member talk about is nothing that I said in this speech. He tried to characterize the opposition as somehow not supporting some of the basic elements of the legislation. I've heard nobody in this House, on the government side or opposition side, saying that we shouldn't give the authority to municipalities or the OSPCA or agents under the OSPCA to be able to carry out inspections. Nobody's argued that. It's not a question of all of us standing here and thumping our chests and saying, "I love my cat, my dog or my bird." The issue is that we all expect animals to be treated with some respect, and that's what this legislation attempts to do.

I just want to correct the record. Earlier, I talked about the young page's brother who lives on Kamiskotia Lake, and I erred. It's not her brother. I'd met her brother on the lake because he was fishing one day. That's another story. They travel there every summer. It's uncle Tom who lives on Kamiskotia Lake. I look forward to seeing Tom as he rolls by my cottage every morning in his scull or whatever it's called. I can almost set my clock by the time he comes by the front window of the cottage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's my pleasure today to get up and respond to Bill 50 at second reading.

I would say, to start with, that all parties, to my understanding, are in support of this legislation in the general sense. That being said, I think the best reference from our position on this would be by our critic Garfield Dunlop, the member from Simcoe North, who gave a one-hour response to the bill yesterday. In preparation for that, I certainly want to listen to his wise advice and advocacy on this bill.

There's a long history to this important theme—certainly emotion, if you will, on this bill. Everyone in the Legislature would support actions to ensure that animals aren't treated cruelly, and I think that in a general sense we have full agreement on that, and all parties would say that.

In fact, if you look at the work that's been done on this, just in recent history, you'd certainly have to respect the work that was done by Julia Munro, the member from York–Simcoe; as well as by Bob Runciman, from Leeds–Grenville, who is the interim leader from our side; as well as the work done by David Zimmer in 2006 in his private member's bill, Bill 154. That should be recognized, as these changes are more or less supported by each party.

I think what you have to look at is the detail. A good part of this bill—and it's no surprise—is really what's the most controversial. I think at the end of the day all that's being said and often repeated here is a regurgitation of Bill 50.

The complaints and e-mails that I'm getting in my riding of Durham would be encouraging me to support the bill in the general sense. That being said, there are portions bringing to my attention—I can cite their names, as Mr. Klees from Newmarket–Aurora did earlier today, and read those same e-mails. In fact, many of the e-mails that are broadly and strongly in support of the legislation are precipitated from the OSPCA website. As stakeholders very much affected by this, they have a generic letter that's being mailed to every member—generally e-mail, sometimes hard copy—and I could read those. They're generic.

What we're trying to do in our office is to look at the clauses within the bill that cause us some concern. There's no such thing as perfection; we're all aiming to improve the bill, and we would call for public hearings, to have persons who love animals of all sorts, of all descriptions, come forward—not just the vested interest groups—and express their views and try to improve the bill.

That being said, I should be clear. My riding of Durham has three or four different facilities that could be at risk because of this bill. The media response on this has really been—these are broad interpretations, and they're my interpretations—that the idea here is to shut down all small zoos. That's it in a nutshell—close them, end them, crush them. If you see the precipitous implication here, in my riding I certainly have more than two, as many as four, that operate in various capacities as zoos. In reading the media, this bill is all about shutting down the small roadside zoos, period, that's it, full stop. That's what it's about. The only logical zoo would be the Toronto Zoo, where there is lots of government money, government funding, blah-blah-blah.

I'm just going to start by saying that the Bowmanville Zoo is an example. The Bowmanville Zoo is a very long-established, privately operated zoo. Michael Hackenberger is the owner of the zoo.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Is it a good zoo?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a very good zoo. It's my understanding his wife is a veterinarian, and Mr. Hackenberger is a professional in animal training. I believe his educational studies are the same. They are rather famously involved, if you will, in the production of movies and things like that, and they have a production studio there on the site at the Bowmanville Zoo. I would encourage people to attend this summer, if you have a chance. They have lions and tigers and elephants and other exotic and interesting animals of a variety of descriptions. When my wife was teaching, her school's primary grade classes went there, and there were shows put on with a variety of animals. Some of them are domestic animals. But the fact is, it is very widely respected, a very definite tourist destination for people in the GTA, and I would encourage you to attend. That may be the only experience for some young children to have the joy of seeing exotic animals—in a proper setting, I put to you.

However, if you look at what's been printed—CAZA, I think, is one of the groups and Zoocheck is another. Zoocheck does an audit of the zoos in Ontario. It goes around and randomly arrives on the doorstep and makes some sort of audit. They didn't speak very highly of the Bowmanville Zoo. I'm wondering how much of that is to put them out of business or make it difficult for them. They put a lot into the protection, care and environment of the animals, I can say with some knowledge. I've talked to them over the many years that I was on council and in other roles, knowing that particular operation.

There was the Oshawa Zoo, which was a very small zoo in the northwest part of my riding and it was often a destination for trips of various groups, but it didn't have a huge budget. I'd be clear about that. There was another with small farm animals—miniature horses and that kind of stuff—they had a few emus, and I think they had a giraffe. They had some really strange animals, sort of a Noah's Ark kind of location. I say that respectfully, because I've been there, and the people were very fond of the animals. I wouldn't say they loved them—that's an improper use of the word—but they certainly were fond of and cared for the animals very much. In fact, I'm sure in many cases they were spending money on food for the animals that they maybe could have used themselves. There's another one in my riding of Durham that most people would know—it's a beautiful riding. If you want to take a trip from Toronto into the countryside of the GTA, there's no better place to go, honestly. This does relate to them, and that's why I'm speaking here this afternoon, to respect the work of these small, mostly family-operated businesses—quite successful businesses, I might say.

1730

The other one is Jungle Cat World. Jungle Cat World is on Highway 35/115, north of the 401, en route to Peterborough or the city of Kawartha Lakes. It's operated by the Klose family and has been for a number of years. Jungle Cat World, as it says, has lions and tigers and a lot of exotic animals. I think they may even have a cheetah and the rest of it there. They're very, very professional people who operate without any public money. There's not some kind of OPSEU sign-up bench as you walk in the front door or something like that. They are professional as well. They're often commented on in Zoocheck. Those other visitors who aren't invited, who just show up and start to—some of these groups, CAZA and others, I think, are really out there and have a broader and different agenda. They're almost part of the PETA group. It's hard to express that. Cruelty, to some people, would be a dog with a collar on. Do you understand? It's the freedom of the animal.

The intent we support is the protection and the prevention of cruelty to animals, but then, when you start the interpretation of some of the bill, you see there's a bit of a political agenda here.

One of the other comments I had is on section 6—and this has been mentioned today. The minister's here, and I do respect that he is here. Section 6 should be looked at. There shouldn't be a proviso that everybody bows down to the organization in section 6, the society.

Also, who are these chief inspectors? Are they qualified? Do they have a degree in history and they're showing up at a zoo telling people—no. If they're a veterinarian, I can see that they're qualified and trained and meet standards, as any self-regulatory body would. Of course, they'd have public members on their advisory group. But the leadership, the chief inspectors, should certainly be veterinarians, I would think. But I'll leave that. Most of these details are to be worked out in regulation.

Section 6 is providing a lot of protection. Just briefly for the public, section 6 is where there are the most public complaints from people who love animals and want the right thing done. You wonder if this is tied to the long-standing disagreement between the OSPCA and the Toronto Humane Society.

In my own family, growing up, we had a dog. We lived on farms most of my life, and then when we were in the city, it wasn't as comfortable. We all had pets, whether it was a dog or a cat or a calf or a horse. In fact, I remember having a horse as a young person. Even now, my grandchildren love horses. I have one grandchild who has a dog, a guinea pig and a rabbit, I believe. It's almost like a small zoo.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, it's not a roadside zoo. It's a home, and they're well cared for.

I will say, though, that my son lives here in Toronto and has a lovely dog. He's a golden lab. His name is Wicklow. He's a beautiful dog, the most well-trained, beautifully behaved dog, but he does take care. They have a new child now, and he takes as much care. Animals never grow up. They are always dependent on having the attention and compassion or caring of the master or whoever. Hopefully, it's not a child that's being cruel, tugging the chain or perhaps playing roughly with the animal.

If someone was to see a child being rough with a pet, some neighbour could say, "That child's being cruel," and the inspector could show up and lay a charge. If you look in sections 11 or 12 here, the fines are pretty onerous—up to $60,000. Watch your Ps and Qs if you're playing roughly with Fluffy the cat. You could end up not being able to afford university. I'm speaking to the pages now because many of them find this unusual.

This is on liability for the owners. There's a provision here for the fines in regulation, but it does state, "Offences." Here it says:

"Penalty—individuals

"(2) Every individual who commits an offence under clause (1)(a), (d) or (e) is liable on conviction to a fine of not more than $1,000 or to imprisonment for a term of not more than 30 days, or to both.

"Same

"(3) Every individual who commits an offence under clause (1)(b) or (c) is liable on conviction to a fine of not more than $60,000 or to imprisonment for a term of not more than two years," which would be a provincial offence.

I want to see the provisions and the regulations of, who's the checker, who's the person knocking on my door, saying, "You committed a violation"? That is not in here.

Section 11 goes on to state the standard of care and those kind of things, but they're all defined in section 22, which is the regulatory section. The regulatory section gives significant power to the minister. I'm going to read this, because this is where the trouble starts. "Clarity, openness, accountability"—these "transparency" words we hear from the McGuinty government all the time—it's saturated with regulations. This is where the trouble begins, not with the premise of protecting animals.

We're going to define in regulations such words as "wildlife" and "fish in the wild." A fish in an aquarium is not the same as a fish in the wild. The little goldfish? That's one thing. Hopefully you're taking care of it. If somebody comes in and says you're not, if the fish is floating in the tank, well, you could be in trouble. In that section, classes of animals will be described.

But in subsection 22(2):

"The minister responsible for the administration of this act may make regulations,...

"(b) prescribing standards of care for the purposes of section 11.1," which I mentioned earlier.

This is where the need for public hearings has been eminently established. I think we will hear from those who love and care for animals as part of their day-to-day life, perhaps their jobs and pursuit of happiness in life. Also, the enforcement issues from bylaw enforcement officers in the community, who will say, "Where are the resources for these new tools to go around and superimpose these rules?"

It could get into the height of a fence. What's the proper height for a fence so a pet can't jump over the fence? What types of pets would be allowed to be kept? Can you keep pets in an apartment? Is it appropriate to have a large dog in a condominium?

These are the working, everyday questions that need to be clarified if we're going to deal with this thing. I know that there are condominiums in Toronto where there are no pets. My mother-in-law loves pets and would love to have a cat, but she's not permitted.

These are issues that stakeholders will have the opportunity, with Bill 50, to come forward and point out to the public.

I've talked about my riding. I've talked about the three destinations. I want to mention one that sent me a letter. They're very concerned. This is Northwood Zoo. The operator there is Norman Phillips. The zookeeper is Anthony Vanzuilekom. I've talked to them and I'm visiting that destination at Northwood, which is just north of Port Perry. If anyone knows Highway 12, off 401, go up there.

There's another destination up there I want to visit as well that I haven't been able to contact yet. Again, they're protectors of animals. In some of these locations they often take animals that have been injured or rejected by a zoo because they're not healthy and nurse them back

to health through their own resources. I want to make sure that there's proper, due care and attention. One thing—that is, entering a premise without a warrant—is quite questionable. Who is coming on the premises? What are their qualifications? If there's some political appointment of Dalton McGuinty coming on my premises and arresting me or laying a charge and then I have to get a lawyer—these are intimidating things that we need to have clarified so that it is a matter of administration.

I'm going to mention in conclusion a very important and yet—in this section, as I said, in the definitions, section 22, there was a provision to talk about defining the classes of animals and exempting of persons.

But there's also a section in there, section 22(1)(b), and it says, "prescribing activities that constitute activities carried on in accordance with reasonable and generally accepted principles of agricultural"—wait a minute here. Animals and agriculture? Houston, we have a problem. You understand? Now, they say they're exempt. They'd better be exempt. I'm not convinced. When I've dealt with this government—not to mention names, but on general principles—they have broken more promises than they've kept. Always be leery. I need to have that.

I'm going to read this in respect to—this is from Zac Cohoon, who is a young professional farmer in my riding, a very widely respected family. He is writing to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and here is what they say:

"On April 3, the Ontario government introduced Bill 50, amendments to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) Act.

"The OFA and its partners have been following the development and progress of the amendments. While we do not condone cruelty towards any animal, be they livestock, pets or wildlife, we do believe that some of the proposed amendments require study and clarification, particularly in relation to their impact and/or application to agriculture.

"It is our understanding that second reading debate on Bill 50 will begin … May 5th.

"We urge farmers to speak with their MPP and request that Bill 50 be sent to a legislative committee for public hearings following second reading."

I'm fully in support of that—not just of Zac Cohoon, but of agriculture itself. Clarity and certainty. And it's not just the minister; the minister only gets to read the bill. It's all about the Premier, Dalton McGuinty, and can you trust him?

If I go back to the PETA argument, the goal here isn't just roadside zoos; the goal here is any animal in captivity. All you have to do is look at the science issues, the agricultural issues, veal calves and other issues: Look around at what you're doing.

I caution members on the government side to listen to your constituents. Put the provisions forward. We want to work with you. We want the prevention of cruelty to animals, for sure. And I ask for public hearings on this bill.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being very close to 5:45 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1742.

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Wednesday 7 May 2008

Mercredi 7 mai 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 7 May 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 7 mai 2008

The House met at 0900.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WEARING OF PINS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I was wondering if I could have the consent of the House to pass these buttons out and let members wear them. They're from the Ontario Electrical League, in support of Ontario's youth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

INVESTING IN ONTARIO ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 PERMETTANT D'INVESTIR DANS L'ONTARIO

Mr. Caplan, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 35, Loi autorisant le ministre des Finances à faire des versements aux bénéficiaires admissibles sur les crédits affectés par la Législature et modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la transparence et la responsabilité financières, la Loi sur le ministère du Trésor et de l'Économie et la Loi de 1991 sur le Conseil du Trésor.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm going to be sharing my time with the very capable and able parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the member for Pickering–Scarborough East, and with the member for Oakville.

This is a very important act, and it's another way this government will be investing, and helping our municipal partners to invest, in infrastructure in the province of Ontario. One of the hallmarks of our government has been the commitment to making these key investments that support the foundation and platform of our economy, and indeed of our society and our communities. This is on the heels of our unprecedented $30-billion-plus ReNew Ontario plan, the first-ever long-term infrastructure investment plan in this province's history. I can tell you that it has produced incredible results: over 100 hospital projects; literally thousands of kilometres of highway; bridges have been repaired; and somewhere in the neighbourhood of 8,000 elementary and secondary school projects. This particular legislation, Bill 35, is going to assist our municipalities. In the event that we have surpluses, we now will be sharing those funds with municipalities so that they too can invest in critical public infrastructure.

I hope all members of this House will be supporting this bill. It is of vital importance. It has the support of municipal leadership from one end of this province to the other. I look forward to seeing this become law, if passed by this Legislature, and indeed to seeing these investments where they are critically needed.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to rise today in respect to Bill 35. I must say that I just had the opportunity a few minutes ago to have a bit of a meeting with the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association. They treated us here in the building to, in effect, a breakfast caucus meeting, so I won't need my double-double today. But I'd appreciate it if one of the pages would bring water at some point; that would be helpful, thank you very much. I find water to be quite adequate for my purposes here, certainly at this time of the morning, anyway, having already had lots of time to get my coffee into me.

I'm so pleased to be here in the Legislature on the third day of our revised schedule, on this bright spring morning in Ontario. I enjoyed my drive in this morning, as I have each morning, for early meetings and starting our debate a little earlier than we're familiar with. It really hasn't changed our days much; just the time we arrive here. Particularly, this seems to be a finance week. We've had the budget measures bill for third reading debate, and this morning we're having the leadoff on the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008. The week just gets better and better, I think, because there will probably be some more debate in respect to finance as we proceed toward the end of this week.

Let me move, if I could, to some of my comments with respect to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008. This is extremely good news for municipalities and for the people of Ontario generally. It would allow for the reduction of provincial debt as a structured format in the event that we have surplus situations, and certainly with projections of a balanced budget, one would anticipate that some dollars would go toward our debt. It's going to help municipalities address the very critical capital needs they all find themselves with.

You know, they didn't get into the situation of having this built-up, pent-up demand for municipal infrastructure

renewal in the last three or four years; as a matter of fact, over the last three or four years we've done a tremendous amount to support municipalities with respect to their infrastructure needs. It took them a long time to get there. It really happened during the eight or 10 years prior to that, when municipalities fell into a situation where their capital infrastructure was declining as they desperately tried to maintain a reasonable amount of operating capacity within their municipalities.

There are many of us in this Legislature who come from the municipal sector, either as municipal councillors or from counties, as mayors, as trustees and as chairs of boards, who have worked in the public sector with municipalities during their time outside this place. We certainly know—all of us in this room know—the critical situation municipalities have found themselves in during the past number of years. They are very, very thankful for the work this government has been doing over the past five years in supporting municipalities, particularly as we move forward in continuing to support their infrastructure needs.

0910

With Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act, we are proposing that we will invest a portion of any unanticipated surplus for 2007-08 in municipal capital priorities. This is something that's unique around here. This is not, at this point, just setting out a specific dollar value; it's saying, "If we happen to have a particularly good year in the provincial sector, if our revenues, as they come in, exceed our expectations." We never know until much later what the final revenue numbers are going to look like. Thus we're prudent, in our fiscal management, to ensure that we at the very least maintain a balanced budget situation. But anticipating a surplus when things go better than we might anticipate, where we would have a slightly larger surplus, we're going to share that in a very significant way with municipalities to work on their municipal priorities.

We, in this government, have a strong history of prudent fiscal management. It's our intention to continue in that way during the years to come during this mandate and, should the people of Ontario see fit, in a subsequent mandate or mandates, as the case may be. We continue to make the strategic investments in people and communities that will build a better Ontario for all of Ontario's citizens; not for any particular group, but for citizens throughout this province, each and every one of whom depends on the municipalities and on municipal infrastructure for the quality of life opportunities they want to share.

We recognize the pressing need of Ontario's municipal infrastructure. I have already said we didn't get into this situation in the short term. It took a long time for municipalities to find themselves in the place they are, with deteriorating infrastructure along the way. With no disrespect to my friends in various places, I can say to my friend from Peterborough, who came from municipal council there, that I used to tell my own council that if they wanted to see what the road systems in the urban core of our municipality might look like within 20 or 30 years, they would need to go to Peterborough. Peterborough has a longer history than Pickering, the municipality I came from, and they had longer time and a change in economy, in which they were having trouble, struggling to keep up with the road infrastructure in their downtown core. As a result, it always gave me a local point of comparison to tell my councillors what they might see in the future if there wasn't provincial government support for municipal infrastructure, in particular road infrastructure.

Now they're doing so much better. During the past four or five years, the member for Peterborough has been such a strong advocate for his municipality and for his riding. If you drive there now, you begin to see the significant changes that are occurring in their infrastructure. I know that those of us who aren't quite that far advanced in the context of the length of time the infrastructure has been in place want to ensure that we retain the infrastructure we have, as well as repair, enhance and renew infrastructure in the province of Ontario.

The greater Toronto area alone, just within this small geographic but large population area, has transportation delays within it caused by gridlock that cost an estimated $2.2 billion per year. That's just the cost to the economy because of delays caused by gridlock in the morning and the afternoon. Every time you take a few minutes off someone's commute or manage to put someone on a transit system, the ultimate impact of that is an enhancement to the economy. It reduces the cost to the economy as a result of that gridlock; it reduces that $2.2-billion-a-year cost resulting from gridlock.

But there are also environmental costs, and social and health costs associated with gridlock. We only need to see the cars that are parked on the Don Valley Parkway—I think it's called that for a particular reason on some days. As I drive in from the eastern part of the city, when I'm not using the GO system, and travel across the 401, I'm not travelling at 90, 100 or 105 kilometres an hour; I'm traveling at 30, 40 and 50. Many, many cars are effectively parked, and when they're parked, they're just adding to pollution in the air and in the environment.

If I saw the weather report accurately this morning, it's going to be 21 degrees Celsius today. Within a matter of days, we'll probably be at 26 or 27 degrees Celsius. As you drive, particularly now from the extended fringes—it used to be from the suburbs, but now you probably have to drive from Barry's Bay, member from Renfrew, before you can get out of what you might see as a smog day. You may even see it there. I'm not sure; I haven't driven in that community of late, not having gotten much further than Bon Echo Provincial Park. By the time you get there, the air is fairly clear.

But you only drive in from the fringes of the greater Toronto area now and you can see the smog days as they build. So the more opportunity we have to invest in municipal infrastructure, to support public transit and to get the road networks working effectively, it can only help with issues such as smog and the health-related costs that go with that.

Our intention, with our municipal partners, is to transform and upgrade the province's 20th-century infrastructure—and clearly it's still 20th-century; in some cases I might even suggest that it's probably 19th-century. I think we can probably find some of the water systems in our old municipalities and some of the sewer systems that better reflect a 19th-century system than a 20th-century system. But we want to ensure that municipalities can meet the challenges of the 21st century, not merely catch up with the laggard situation they found themselves in, in the dying days of 20th century, the late 1990s, with a provincial government that saw little need to support municipalities but found ways to simply download costs upon them.

Speaker, as you are aware, we have already committed to the largest investment in provincial infrastructure in the past 50 years. ReNew Ontario is an opportunity to see the municipal infrastructure of this province come up to speed, come up to standard, come up to today's current needs within the province of Ontario. We are making, with our municipal partners in all sectors, a very, very significant investment. It's creating jobs, it's creating opportunity in this province and it's creating an infrastructure that we desperately need as we move into—we're moving close to the end of the first decade of the 21st century already. It doesn't take long for a decade to go by, but it takes time to put the necessary infrastructure in place.

A major factor in attracting private investment is the state and quality of available infrastructure. It's not just about the constituents within the province of Ontario; it's not just about their own desires and needs from the standpoint of using the infrastructure. It's about the capacity to create, to encourage, to support and to make Ontario a good place to invest for private investment within this province. I was mentioning this morning that I had the opportunity, with some other members, to have a meeting with the automobile manufacturers' association. Among the issues that they face—we're all familiar with the challenges the automotive sector faces—is the capacity to move their product to its market. It's not just driving it down the road; it's transporting it down the road. When so much of our auto industry is dependent upon export, we need to move those vehicles outside of the province and across the province. To achieve that, we need the road infrastructure network that will help make that occur. The leaders of the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association spoke very highly this morning of the support they've had from government generally in their business environment, but more particularly the announcement just the other day—that was derided by some members of this Legislature; not on our side, Speaker, but some members of this Legislature on the other side derided our decisions, the final decision we've come to, along with other partners both nationally and internationally, for the border crossing and the road network in and through Windsor, that you will be very, very familiar with. The auto industry sees that as a critical element in their continued success in enhancing their opportunity to move their product effectively down the 401 and into the market that they serve. We're very anxious to see that municipal-provincial-federal infrastructure capacity enhanced and move forward quickly. This is exactly the kind of thing that will make that happen.

To be competitive in the global economy, we have to have the right skills and we have to have state-of-the-art facilities. We're putting our plan into action to help Ontario become a more modern and attractive place to live and do business. That's why this bill is entitled Investing in Ontario, because it allows us to have a more balanced approach to paying down debt while making these critical investments in Ontario.

Let me speak, if I can, a little more specifically about the content of the bill in addition to what it's going to provide to municipalities, to constituents in Ontario, how it supports private sector investment, and ultimately how it assists, whether it's our health or in an environmental context. I want to talk a little bit about some of the detail on a high-order level for the purposes of our discussion this morning.

0920

If the province achieves a surplus position in excess of $800 million, the first $600 million of that will go to reduce the provincial debt. We think that's the right thing to do. We want to ensure that we are not only sending a signal but doing the right thing in the context of our accumulated deficit in this province and that we're making commitments on surplus situations first—first—to the accumulated deficit. That has to be a priority. It's what our constituents expect, it's what business expects, and it's what we expect of ourselves. In our own families we expect to pay down our debt. We expect to pay down our mortgages as a priority in our lives. We expect if we bought a vehicle that we will pay that down. We expect that we will put some money away for a critical investment of some sort, whether it's our children's education—we treat that as a debt, in effect. It's a need that's going to be there.

But once we've done that, we want to ensure that there is a capacity as well for municipalities to be able to share in any surplus situation that might occur. This means that if in effect the province were to achieve a surplus situation of $800 million, a minimum of $200 million would be spent for municipal spending in additional capital opportunities for municipalities.

If the surplus, though, is less than $800 million, it goes straight to the debt. There's a point where we need to say, "Does it make sense to distribute a small amount of money to municipalities on a per capita basis, or does it make sense to enhance the payment into the provincial accumulated deficit?" Once we reach that threshold, municipalities could find themselves in a position to share up to $2 billion of provincial surplus throughout the province both with what we refer to as single-tier or upper-tier municipalities—for example, the city of Toronto, which would be thought of as a single-tier municipality, is the largest and easiest example. For those of us who know regional structures, the Niagara region gov-

ernment would be considered an upper-tier municipality. They would share on a per capita basis in the surplus situation, as would what we refer to as lower-tier municipalities. In an area like where I'm in, with part of my riding being in Toronto, single-tier, and part being in Durham, Pickering being a two-tier structure, the region of Durham would share in some of the surplus, as would the lower-tier municipalities, of which there are eight. So Pickering, Ajax, Whitby and others would all share on a per capita basis any surplus that may arise, anywhere up to $2 billion shared across the province.

With the 2007-08 surplus, they have the wonderful opportunity in this particular calendar year as they move through their budgetary processes to continue to invest in infrastructure in the province of Ontario. That's not the only investment opportunity they've had because municipalities across this province have already shared in the MIII program, as an example, with some $450 million that was shared broadly across the province. There were some exclusions—the city of Toronto was one of those—but there are other mechanisms whereby the city of Toronto has had considerable support for public transit. Bill 35, Investing in Ontario Act, is on top of what we've already been doing with our municipal partners both in the past year and during the time that we've had in office.

The municipalities are going to have flexibility to use their funds for their own capital purposes. It's for roads and bridges, it's to expand public transit, it could be to upgrade their social housing stock and it could be for other municipal infrastructure. But it's not going to be a blank cheque to them. There will be checks and balances in place. They will know the funding envelope, based on the formula, once we know the actual fiscal position the province has as a result of public accounts being finalized. There will be checks and balances to ensure that the dollars are being spent for capital infrastructure needs within municipalities.

They are best positioned to be able to identify and choose the priorities that best suit their needs; they know best. As I said before, many of us in this room have come from the municipal sector and we know from that experience that it's at the very local level, on the ground, where the constituents speak to their councillors and to their mayor, that they have their debates in a public forum as we do. The media reports regularly. They're best positioned to establish the priorities that will best meet their needs, not only in the short term, but capital investments are about the longer term, to ensure that they have the stability in their operations that they so desperately want and need.

We will have accountability provisions in place. It will be consistent with the province's new transfer payment directives. There will be report-backs from those municipalities on how the funds were used. We will retain the right to independent verification or audit, and that's an interesting little piece of what we're doing with this. We don't expect to have to use it. We don't anticipate that municipalities will be doing anything save and except investing in that critically necessary infrastructure within their municipalities. But the province is going to keep the right to do a verification, to do an audit if necessary, to ensure that those dollars that are being expended in municipalities are being expended in the way that we had envisioned within the legislation, the way we envisioned that the surplus dollars could be used to enhance the capital opportunity, the capital position, the capital infrastructure needs of municipalities.

The McGuinty government is ensuring within the legislation that the funding will be distributed equitably. This is not about winners and losers in municipalities; this is about ensuring that all Ontarians and all municipalities have the opportunity to share. To ensure that available funds are distributed in a fair and transparent manner to all municipalities, we're proposing to use a per capita allocation for both upper-tier and single-tier municipalities in the province. That's probably among the easiest ways for the public to be able to identify whether or not they feel their community is getting a fair share of the resources that are there. We all understand, on a per capita basis, if you have 100,000 people in your community, then you have X number of dollars related to that 100,000, against the 12.5 million to 13 million people in the province of Ontario. It's a fairly easy manner for people to identify and do a comparator within a reasonable sense. Large municipalities, then, would have larger dollars coming to them; smaller municipalities would have a smaller number of dollars. One would expect that the capital infrastructure needs would vary based on the size of the municipality, based on its population.

Not only will the upper-tier and the single-tier governments share on a per capita basis, but the lower-tier portion would be distributed on a per capita basis. It obviously needs a formula when you have two tiers of government, but the principles remain the same in the allocation of those dollars. We know in two-tier structures that the upper tier has particular infrastructure needs. They manage the water and sewer systems, as an example. The lower-tier systems have different needs. They have the local road network that is there among their principle responsibilities that need constant upgrading and always, always need investment.

As I said early on, the legislation, as it's presented here for third reading debate today—hopefully, at the end of the day, all members of the Legislature will see the wisdom in ensuring that we support our local, regional and single-tier municipalities, but they'll also see the wisdom in ensuring that we provide a portion of any surplus that may be achieved to pay down the accumulated deficit of the province of Ontario. It makes sense to pay down our debt, so we want to do both: We want to ensure that we have debt reduction and to ensure that we have an opportunity to see investment in what might be considered broadly government priorities. They may not be things we control directly, but municipal infrastructure remains a provincial priority because those infrastructure investments also help to drive business opportunities within the province of Ontario.

You know, sometimes we need to talk a little bit, I think, to frame the debate a bit, in the context of some of

the broader budget measures that we put in place. Because the capacity to be able to even address Bill 35 in any fashion very much depends upon some of the other initiatives that have been undertaken to establish what the value structure might be for municipalities. We have to balance that along with other investments that we made as a province, particularly investments that we made in municipal infrastructure.

In the 2008 budget document—frankly, on a different day, yesterday, we were having third reading debate on the budget measures bill, which over the next while will also come to some conclusion along the way, this being a subset of that, in effect.

0930

Included in that document, in addition to these dollars, which could amount to up to $2 billion for municipalities if in effect the surplus were that large, we're investing some $1 billion in new municipal infrastructure in 2007-08. Just in the fall, we announced some $450 million for the MIII program. That was based on an initial announcement that was made in the fall economic statement but also was built upon financially to build this quantum of some $450 million for municipal infrastructure. There are municipalities throughout the province of Ontario right now which are currently probably in the process of, if not physically doing some of the work, issuing the tenders that will allow them to do the work on infrastructure investments that will come from the MIII investment.

We're investing some $400 million in this budget document for municipal roads and bridges in communities outside of Toronto. We hear consistently here in the Legislature, and from our municipal colleagues, about the road structure necessity, about the importance of roads and bridges, about the importance of moving people and goods in small-town and rural Ontario, as I'll refer to it. Sometimes I think outside the city of Toronto, for me, is outside of the greater Toronto area, having a foot in Toronto and a foot in Durham region. I think beyond that, we hear most consistently from folks about the needs of smaller-town Ontario, rural communities, and investments in their roads and bridges as so critical to them. Often those municipalities don't have the fiscal capacity, because of population, sometimes, and simply because they don't have the industry base to be able to maintain, enhance and upgrade those roads and bridges to the extent they want to. That some $400 million for municipal roads and bridges in those communities outside of Toronto is so critically necessary to them, and this is a very good year for them to be able to undertake that kind of work.

There was $100 million to rehabilitate municipal social housing, including improving their energy efficiency. As I mentioned early on, among the types of infrastructure capacity needs that municipalities may want to address as a result of the investments from Bill 35 could be the social housing stock. One might even think of this as a down payment of sorts. Although we don't know the quantum of the surplus that might exist under Bill 35, we know the need is there, and $100 million to work on social housing stock is important. It's not going to solve all the problems by any means. I think we'll hear from members opposite at some point of quantums of numbers that would be such that we couldn't take all of the money and still repair all of the social housing stock. This is a good investment in that, particularly, I would suggest, including improving their energy efficiency, because we know that existing social housing stock doesn't have the energy efficiency strategy structures in place at this point in time and thus needs to have investments in those areas.

It not only makes for a better living environment, it also reduces the cost of operation, ultimately reduces the cost for those who are occupying the units and builds into their life structure a commitment to and a participation in the energy efficiency needs of this province that we all want to participate in, in one fashion or another: reducing energy consumption and finding alternative means by which to use energy. Those who are renting in a social housing environment in that stock of homes across the province also want the opportunity to participate in that. They can't do that unless there are some incentives in place to do that, and we think this $100 million in social housing, in part to improve energy efficiency, will go a long way to allow them to feel and know that they are actively participating in the priorities that we are seeing set out.

We're investing, in this budget document—as I said, we're going to talk a little bit about the context—some $970 million to be invested in capital investments to build and renew places where students learn. We're talking about universities and colleges. We're talking about that infrastructure that's going to provide the physical environs that will provide the next generation of young professionals, those who do the work on the next RIMs of the world, our doctors, our lawyers—maybe even some of our politicians. We have a couple of young people who are summer interns with the finance ministry at this point in time. I know there are a number of summer interns here in the Legislature. I had a chance to chat with two young people yesterday. One is at York University and the other is a Dalhousie graduate, proceeding on to—I'm trying to think of where she's going in the fall. It'll probably come to me. Nonetheless, of both of those young people, one is going to finish their undergraduate work and one is working on a dual master's degree and wants to go into law.

These are very bright young adults, and I was saying that it's really encouraging to see bright young people getting an education and taking an active interest in the political system, in the policy structures of the provincial government. I think it augurs well for the future for us. It's why we need to make these kinds of investments; it's why making a nearly $1.97-billion investment in the capital infrastructures of colleges and universities is so critically important on a go-forward basis. We can't measure these things over the basis of a year or two; we have to measure them on the basis of a generation or two. We have to take a look at those young people and say, "What are they contributing? What are the expectations that they have? What are their aspirations as young people coming

into adulthood in this province of Ontario, where they want to be, where they want to learn about policy structures, where they want to be professionals? What are they going to be contributing over the next generation here in the province of Ontario?" We have to look at our investments in that way.

We have to look at our investments in roads and bridges in very much the same way. Those are hard infrastructure investments that we drive on and move product on, but we have to look at this other type of infrastructure as well, in the context of what it means to young people in the learning environment they find themselves in.

One of the hallmarks of our government has been public transit. We came to office four and a half years ago, and during that 2003 campaign, we made a commitment to dedicate two cents per litre of gas tax to public transit in the province of Ontario. We fulfilled that commitment early in the mandate. We didn't wait until the end of the mandate; we looked at the fiscal situation, once we moved through that first, messy year of a $5.6-billion deficit, and by the end of our second full year, we had a balanced budget. We were able to accelerate that commitment of support to municipalities for their transit systems.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's $310 million a year now.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: The member from Eglinton–Lawrence says that we're at $310 million per year. I just couldn't recall the numbers; thank you. But this year alone, we're investing almost $500 million, $497 million for public transit just in the greater Toronto area and Hamilton for Metrolinx projects and other transit priorities. That's not even taking into account the gas tax revenue itself. That's for Metrolinx. That's to—

Mr. Mike Colle: What is Metrolinx—

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Metrolinx was referred to as the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. It's a collaborative effort of municipalities, municipal transit systems and GO Transit within the Golden Horseshoe, Hamilton and the greater Toronto area, which are working to expedite transit systems in the province of Ontario—looking at bus rapid transit strategies, looking at means by which GO Transit can be more effective. It's an integration of our transit systems so that they're not stand-alone systems.

The member from Eglinton–Lawrence, being a former Metro Toronto councillor, will know this: One of the big challenges over the years has been the stand-alone operations that we've seen for municipal transit systems, where you couldn't cross boundaries. I can tell you a very quick story. In my time in the mayor's office in Pickering, we had the Pickering Transit system. We didn't even have then the Ajax-Pickering system, whose board the member from Ajax–Pickering sat on with me when we established the Ajax Pickering Transit Authority, which has now become Durham Region Transit, involving not just Ajax and Pickering but Whitby and Oshawa—and the Handi-Trans support systems, specialized transit, is all rolled into that.

But one of the big challenges is always that cross-boundary activity. Nobody talked to each other. We wanted to run a bus into Scarborough and see whether there were enough users to really justify taking a bus from Pickering into Toronto. We determined at that time that the University of Toronto Scarborough campus—which is now in my riding; it's the first time I've had a post-secondary educational institution in my riding, and it's a wonderful institution. I met with some of their senior folks the other day, actually. Nonetheless, we wanted to bus in to see what the ridership capacity would be.

The challenge of the day wasn't getting our buses there; that was okay. We got an okay from the TTC to run our buses in there. What we weren't able to achieve in those early days was the capacity—what we would call the open-door run on the way back. We had to do what we called a closed-door run; i.e., we couldn't pick up a passenger and bring them back to Pickering. So if there was anybody there, we couldn't bring them home. We could take them there, but we couldn't get them home.

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Metrolinx, as it's now called—there's been a new structure over the years. The co-operation over a period of time, bringing municipalities together, bringing co-operation among transit systems, means we can do those cross-boundary things where it makes sense, and we get a lot more co-operation in that regard.

Bill 35 and our investment in municipal infrastructure is a critically important part of this budget. We want to share with municipalities the opportunity that if we achieve a surplus situation that's good for the province, that's good to pay down the debt, we want to ensure the municipalities are able to share in that and build on their infrastructure program.

Let me just finish by saying that we're building on the plan we have to strengthen our economy. We're taking every opportunity available to us to invest in our municipalities, as well as invest in the province, in a prudent and responsible way, to ensure that the fiscal management of this province remains strong, and to build on the strength and expertise that exists within each and every municipality to the benefit of every Ontarian.

At this point, I'm going to share my time—I think the minister said I would—with the member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It certainly is a pleasure to join the debate on third reading of Bill 35. Like the previous speaker, the member for Pickering–Scarborough East, I have a long background in local politics. For 18 years, I served on the town of Oakville council, the council for the region of Halton as well. During that period, I was chair of the health and social services committee, child care committee, president of the children's aid society and chair of the budget economy. So I've really seen provincial politics, from all three parties, at the local level over a fairly long period of time, and I've seen different approaches.

If I could sort of typify those approaches over the years, in the 1980s you had Bill Davis and Peterson making a fairly good effort to try to work with municipalities. We moved on to the Rae government, the NDP government. I think it was a good try, but it fell far short. But I

think if you had to look at the darkest period of the relationship between a province and its member municipalities, you'd have to look to the Mike Harris years. Even the member for Wellington–Halton Hills would share some of that sentiment, because I know he—and a very good friend of mine, the now regional chair of the region of Halton—had some things to say, both in public and private, that weren't too complimentary to the Premier of the day. I think they deserve an awful lot of credit for standing up for some of the things that were done during that period.

It was simply bad news for municipalities. When you're trying to provide some of the services, you need to do that. People, the taxpayers of Ontario, expect us to work in a partnership. That's a partnership between the federal government, the provincial government and the local levels of government. Since we've taken office in 2003, I think we've made some great strides in being able to establish that partnership with the local levels of government.

Unfortunately, currently, I can't say the same thing about the federal level of government. As a previous speaker alluded to, there was a meeting held this morning; the auto caucus met with the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association. They simply expressed their support for the approach we were taking towards industry in this province and expressed a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the approach being taken by the federal government.

Bill 35, in my estimation, is a plan to move forward. It gives some confidence to the municipalities that there's a plan in place that starts to repair some of the downloading that was done during the dark years of the previous government. I think it deserves the support of all members of this House. It certainly is a move forward. As I said, there's great support from civic leaders. Mayor McCallion and Mayor Miller have spoken in glowing terms about this initiative. It's something that I think is worthy of support of all members of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: In the time I have available, I just want to comment about Bill 35, because I think a lot of people question the whole legitimacy of having such significant surpluses. Obviously, they're taxpayer dollars. Certainly, creating a budget, as every government is obligated to do, is always a work in progress. What you're suggesting in a budget is, "This is where we intend to spend money. This is where we intend to collect money." Obviously, at the end of the day you hope that it all balances out. What this particular bill proposes to do is provide an option for the government in terms of spending any of the monies that would flow at the end of the year.

I think when you look at the details—much has been made by the government about the fact that this would be a boon to municipalities, yet when you actually look at the bill as it is written, there is no reference made to municipalities. In fact, we are left to look, then—if that's the intent of the government, how would municipalities respond to this kind of uneven, unstable method of funding when, actually, that's what they need most? I think this bill carries forward from a previous bill that the former government put in place, which was to put any monies towards the debt. Since it's all taxpayers' money, that's where it belongs.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: There's no question about what this bill is. This is a slush fund bill. This is Dalton McGuinty as George Orwell. This is Nineteen Eighty-Four, when the Ministry of Truth said, "Ignorance is strength." Ignorance of what's in this bill is its strength. Because what's in this bill is the licence for the McGuinty government to give money to its friends under cover of law. That's what this bill is about. There is nothing about municipalities in this bill; there is nothing about infrastructure in this bill. In fact, this bill is so egregious that the Auditor General has spoken up loudly. Of course, he has been shut down by McGuinty Orwell, but he spoke out against the bill, saying that this goes against all accounting practice that anyone would recognize as legitimate accounting practice.

So again, it wasn't enough that they were able to give over $32 million away to friends of the Liberal Party last year. That made the front page of the newspaper. This year they want to do it under cloak of law. So this year, instead of giving $1 million to a cricket club that asks for $150,000, and in response to getting $1 million said they should have asked for $2 million—instead of that, this year they're going to pass this egregious piece of legislation that's going to allow them to have a legitimate slush fund. Anything over $600 million, they get to do with what they want. Again, there's nothing in the bill about infrastructure; there's nothing in the bill about municipalities. Despite the spin, despite the Ministry of Truth that is operative across the aisle, despite all of what this government pretends is in the bill and pretends they're trying to do with Bill 35, I would challenge anybody watching at home to actually get to Bill 35, look at what's in the bill, and I double-dare you to find "infrastructure" and "municipality" there. What you will find is Orwell. What you will find is a McGuinty government at their less than truthful best.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm so pleased to join in the debate on the third reading of Bill 35. It is so critical, the investments that we're making in communities right across the province. I only need to look at my own community of Etobicoke–Lakeshore to focus on the importance of the investments in public transit, as one example, a community like Etobicoke–Lakeshore, where many of my constituents commute into the downtown core or beyond for work, going either out to Mississauga or across the city, coming in to downtown to earn their living. We are a community that has four subway stations and three GO train stations. So we really benefit from now the cross-efforts being made to see investment in transit infrastructure across the city and across the province with something like Metrolinx, which my colleague the PA to the Minister of Finance was discussing earlier.

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We recently had a significant investment in the Kipling subway station, as an example. The province came to the table to assist the Kipling subway station to become an interregional hub so that we could have buses coming in from Mississauga, not affecting high-traffic areas in the streets of our community—critical to pull them away from Islington subway station into Kipling subway station, which will now be an interregional hub.

At the time, we also looked well into the future to determine, perhaps with an additional rail line which already exists at Kipling subway station, that we might be able to eventually have a link into the airport from Kipling subway, which is now a link by bus out to the airport. So a community like Etobicoke–Lakeshore, where head offices choose to relocate because their folks can get to work easily and quickly, is of critical importance and has benefited from the investments that are being made in communities.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have a moment to reply to the speeches brought forward from the government members in support of Bill 35. Of course, you would expect the government members are quite supportive of this bill and talk about its virtues, but certainly our role in opposition is to point out some of the flaws and some of the drawbacks.

This Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991, isn't what it appears, I am afraid to say.

The municipal councillors in Wellington–Halton Hills initially were quite pleased to hear of the fact that the Minister of Finance was committing to share a significant portion of future surpluses with the municipal governments for infrastructure when he made his announcement on March 12, but it was only a couple of weeks later that the budget was read in this House. Of course, we found that the surplus the government was anticipating for the coming fiscal year did not approach even closely the $600-million threshold upon which the money would be triggered. So there was a great deal of disappointment, in our riding certainly, and I would have to say that the government needs to take a fresh look at this issue to ensure that there is predictable, sustainable funding for municipalities in terms of their infrastructure needs.

This is an issue that I've raised for many years in this Legislature, going back to my first term in the Legislature, and I would continue to argue that smaller rural municipalities in particular that lack the tax base of some of our urban communities require a substantial degree of support from the provincial government to ensure that they have a basic infrastructure for their residents. This bill, unfortunately, does not do it. It doesn't do it. And we have to continue to raise it, evidently. I'm very concerned about this issue, and I'll continue to speak against this particular bill because it lacks the integrity that we need from this provincial government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Response?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to, obviously, thank the members for York–Simcoe, Parkdale–High Park, Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Wellington–Halton Hills for their comments. I was pleased to hear—I didn't catch whether he was speaking just for himself or for his caucus—that the Progressive Conservatives support the bill, although they're doing their job in opposition to point out what they feel are some of the shortcomings that might exist.

Let me just make two comments in the minute and a half that I have in respect to some of the comments. By the end of this mandate, by 2011, the McGuinty government will have increased the annual operating support to municipalities—that's the stable, predictable funding, the ongoing annual operating support—by over $1.7 billion. It's an increase of 160% compared to where we were in 2003. That's not if we happen to have a good year and a surplus situation; that's ongoing support to municipalities on an annual basis to exceed $1.7 billion. Time doesn't allow today to go into the long list. I mentioned in the early part of the debate the gas tax, which is an annual operating support mechanism. There is a long list of those.

I want to take the last 30 seconds to talk briefly about—I mentioned context. Bills alone often have places they have to belong. This one belongs in the budget. Let me speak to page 111 in the budget, for those who haven't had the opportunity to find out where municipalities fit into this play. "The government has introduced the proposed Investing in Ontario Act," Bill 35, "that would permit the use of a portion of unanticipated year-end surpluses" for "needs ... such as municipal infrastructure deficits." It speaks to, "If enacted, the government will use the regulation making authority"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to see you in the chair on this bright Wednesday morning, and it's a pleasure to take part in the debate.

I just want to start by saying that our critic on this file, the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, Mr. Tim Hudak, isn't here, but he certainly would like to have an opportunity to say a few things on this as we wrap up, because this is just outrageous. It's outrageous because here's a government that's accumulating more and more debt every year, and they want to not pay it off. They want to leave that debt to your children. To the young pages here: Be cautious. Here's Dalton McGuinty. With this bill, what he's actually doing is not paying off the mortgage, the debt, which means that in the great province that we share, the debt is growing. The debt is growing to almost—I can hardly say the words—$163 billion. What happens with that is the debt is owed to someone else. It could be China, it could be India, it could be Brazil or it could be the United States; somebody holds that debt. They've loaned it to us on good faith. We have to pay off, every year, the cost of carrying that debt, the

interest. The interest on that debt is about $10 billion, and growing. If the economy goes a little bit out of control, which it seems to be, the interest rate could go up and the cost of borrowing will go up. I'm so concerned now that they're spending more money on debt servicing, the interest alone, to, in many cases, foreign places, than they are in education. This is your future. That's why I'm so passionately concerned about how they've got this all wrong. It's like being a spoiled child. They want everything today.

Now, I'm going to change the tone a bit. Our member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, Tim Hudak, during the hearings on this bill moved several amendments, all of which were turned down. Unbelievably, they won't listen. They want to have their cake and eat it too. They want to have these year-end slush-fund lottery-style giveaway campaigns to ridings that they're trying to win. That's what has been happening. They have a riding—for instance, it could be Northumberland or Peterborough, and if the member, Jeff Leal or Lou Rinaldi, is in a bit of trouble, they'll dole out some dough, almost, so that they would have a better chance of winning. I'm completely opposed to that manipulative spending of public money, taxpayers' money. I'm completely opposed to it, and we all should be outraged at allowing this minister to intrude into how to distribute the surplus at the end of the year. That's what Bill 35 is about. It gives the minister a lot of powers to do things that—it's the process we have trouble with. We're not opposed to giving money that's surplus to the needs of the people of Ontario, to municipalities to help with hospitals, to help with bridges, to help with recreation centres and things that are important to our health, our economy and the health of the people of Ontario. We're not opposed to that at all.

In fact, I'm going to get a little bit more specific here. I listened with some interest, as I'm the municipal affairs critic—and I have been the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health in the almost 15 years I've been here, and I know the pressures on the government. I know how difficult it is. The economy is collapsing underneath—the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is here this morning, which is good to see. Her riding of Windsor has the highest unemployment rate in Canada. It's tragic. It's almost worse than—and here she is in China, and I think she's going to Paris next week, or something. We want our leaders to be here in the province and trying to defend, at least respect, the people.

When I listen to the member from Pickering–Scarborough East, Mr. Arthurs—he's a fine gentleman; I know him well. I served for a very brief time on the regional government, when he was the mayor of Pickering. He's a very capable person. I'm surprised he's on that side of the floor, and more surprised still that he's not in cabinet. But that's a whole debate for another day. He has been given a speech to read. I don't think he actually believes some of the stuff he's saying; he's just reading it. Because the truth is, he knows as well as the member from Oakville, Mr. Flynn, who was, like myself—many people here on all sides served at some level of government, municipal or school board or other functions, before we got here, and that experience we bring to the place. I would say this: Always look to the history to teach you about where you are or where you're going. Learn from history.

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Now, what Mr. Flynn said was absolutely incorrect, totally false; it has absolutely no basis in fact. If you want to look to what he said was downloading by Mike Harris—now there's a lot of press, mostly negative, on Mike Harris. But that was, I believe, the impression of the media. But look to what Mike Harris inherited. What he inherited—and I'm not justifying all of the decisions, or any of them, or not justifying them; I'm saying the reality was this: The budget at the time, in 1994-95, when Floyd Laughren was the Treasurer—a nice fellow as well; quite a capable guy, too—was about $48 billion, the total budget of the province, and the deficit was a little less than $12 billion. That's 25 cents on every dollar they didn't have. I was chair of the budget locally, in my constituency, at the time, and they had a plan that they sent around to all the municipalities, a big letter from Bob Rae. Bob Rae is now a Liberal; he was NDP. He hasn't made up his mind. He was a Liberal then, as well, which is fine. And I think he's a great guy; there's nothing wrong with that. I hope he gives Stéphane Dion a run for the money, because he will try for the leadership there. But that's a different debate for a different day. Here's the deal, though. He sent a letter out to AMO and ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. Every mayor in the province of Ontario got a copy of the letter. The letter said—I remember it. It was called the expenditure reduction plan. I can see it right now back in 1994. Ed Philip was the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Floyd Laughren was Treasurer. The letter said, "Please try to save some money. We're in big trouble here." There was a recession. Ontario's heading down the exact same road.

I worked in the auto sector for 30 years. All the signs are there. I hate to predict it—and these things come, and we will recover; I'm confident of that. Ontario is a great province. Here's the deal, though. The municipalities said, "Are you kidding?" They looked at their budgets and our budget. In the public sector, 85% of all the dollars in the budget are payroll. So if you want to cut the budget, it's people's jobs, it's families that no longer have an income. It's very tough. You're better off to blame Bob Rae or Stephen Harper or Paul Martin—some higher level of government—for this problem that you're in. It couldn't be your own fault, that you had spent more than your income would support. No, they always want to blame some other level of government.

My point is this: No one in 1994 would agree with cutting their budget. So Bob Rae and Ed Philip and Floyd Laughren and Frances Lankin called all the union leaders in to a big meeting here at Queen's Park, and the school leaders as well. Education is very important and it was part of the municipal tax bill—it came from the munici-

pality but it was by the school boards. They called them all in, and what happened? They all walked out on him. So they implemented the social contract. I don't care which NDP person is here today or was there then or in the future; that's like a brand. The social contract was downloading. They forced every employee of the province of Ontario in school boards, colleges, hospitals, municipalities, all of what they call the MUSH sector—municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals—to take a number of days off to save money. Now, the intent was good. The intent was quite realistic. In fact, the intent was that no one would lose their job. And in fairness to the NDP, that was the choice they made of how to implement this expenditure reduction plan.

The people were just outraged. My wife was a teacher. I had a daughter who was just starting teaching at the time. They were never engaged or emotionally attached to the political decision-making process, but I'll tell you, they sure were then.

It has transformed Ontario. All the public sector is completely vertically integrated now. If you mention cuts or efficiencies or downsizing, the unions just line up like that. They are militant, shoulder to shoulder: "We will not." You hear the drums outside now.

If Dalton wants to save the $96 billion in our budget, it's payroll. I'm telling you, it's payroll. If he wants to save any money, he's got to make tough decisions, and I don't think he has the fortitude to make tough decisions. Now, I will say this: He can fiddle around with the cosmetic pesticide act, he can fiddle around with the cruelty to animals act, he can fiddle around with the Lord's Prayer, all these tokenistic kinds of pieces. There's no substance to them at all. He's ducking the real issue. However, this bill will give him a bit more play money to dole out at the end of the year to shore up the popular vote. Unfortunately, it's very cynical of me to say that.

Hon. James J. Bradley: So cynical.

Mr. John O'Toole: It is, unfortunately.

Now, what is behind this? What is the second tier? It's the Jim Flaherty approach of being competitive, which is widely criticized in the media.

It isn't Jim Flaherty saying it. Last week in my riding of Durham, I attended a really interesting annual general meeting which Premier McGuinty spoke at. He's a very nice person, don't ever get me wrong, and everybody here wants to do the right thing, but the job is about making tough decisions. Bob Rae found that out when he called the social contract. He didn't want to do that; he had to. The real leadership job here is not about cutting ribbons; it's about putting out fires. That's the job here. Anybody can cut a ribbon. You could, I could, and I'm not in the leadership. McGuinty, his Dwight Duncan and others are.

But here's my point: At the annual general meeting for the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's 96th anniversary—and they did a survey prior to that. In fact, they usually appear before the finance committee. The member for Pickering–Scarborough East would have been part of those meetings, as would Tim Hudak, the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook.

The six top issues given to the government, without any political bias—Greg Sorbara was a fairly decent finance minister, but he's not there any more and I'm concerned that Dwight—he screwed up the electrical file and now he's going to screw up the finance file. But he's got a lot of seniority over there and a lot of connections, so he's got the job.

Here's what their wish list was—this is not Jim Flaherty; this is the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Their first request: "What are the six top things the Ontario government could do to assist you in the next 24 months?" They said—not some politician; I'm just reading this stuff, but it's important to read what other stakeholders say—to reduce corporate income taxes. It's the very first thing they said. The second thing was to recognize investment in innovation. In fairness, the government did a piece of that. That's the fund that's going to exempt innovative business from corporate tax. Those are businesses that take R and D, academic knowledge and patent information and commercialize it, making rubber into a boat or a car or something like that. The next thing was to refund tax credits for small business; remove the PST for the purchase of equipment and modernization; reduce the red tape on business; and increase training tax credits. Well, I don't think they did very much on any of that. That's the top-six list they asked for.

If you go through and look at this Ontario Chamber of Commerce report—I should say that it was celebrated in Oshawa because that's the home of the auto industry. Sam McLaughlin, the Oshawa area and the whole Durham region is the area that motivates Canada. And these are suffering times. There are lots of families who would like to have some of this year-end surplus themselves. Year-end surplus is actually excess tax revenue. Let's keep it in perspective.

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It was the 80th anniversary for the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce. Bob Malcolmson and the current and past presidents and all the dignitaries were there. They had a great celebration, but they also had the same list. Surprisingly, they had a very similar list. I'm just going to say there were a number of important observations by the chamber of commerce. Here is just one. I just turned the page at random; it's nothing specific. One specific action that the small businesses of Ontario asked of Dalton McGuinty was this. Now, think of this; think closely about these actions by the leader of the province of Ontario. Just think of these things, how important they are.

During the election, Premier McGuinty was feeling rather chipper one day, cheerful, so he suddenly decided to declare a provincial holiday. Well, who wouldn't like that? Let's call it Family Day. How smarmy. I wonder that he didn't have one of the Smurfs on the stage with him. But anyway, he decided to have the holiday.

This is what one business said. This is from the chamber of commerce, business leaders, people who create jobs and investment and feed their families; their em-

ployees work, and they hopefully reward them. It says that one respondent noted that the family holiday will cost him $40,000—or her; or it could have been a family that owned a small business, too. There are estimates, and now if you look at the detail, the public sector, whether the police got it off or the union got it off or the fire or the ambulance or the various public sector employees got it off—whatever, it's a drag on the economy. It's actually like putting a hole in a brick wall so the wind can come in. Is it appropriate? I think by giving more people more flexibility, but everybody having a holiday on a given day by decree by the Premier—completely inappropriate.

A lot of them will have holidays: Over 200,000 people are going to be on holidays called layoffs or dismissals. That's a non-solicited holiday, and that's the dilemma in Ontario. The economy is going south if you look at any measurement.

Now, what's Dalton doing that about that? Premier McGuinty; I want to be respectful. During the past couple of weeks, there have been a couple of questions to the Premier and he—I'm going to repeat it, because it seems to me that somehow—

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I have to interrupt on a point of order. Can you ascertain if there's a quorum in the house?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Quorum is present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: In terms of the advice given to the Premier by his own group—now I think this is important to put on the record. Premier McGuinty has commissioned a group, a task force of experts, to give him and his cabinet advice on how to deal with the hemorrhaging economy. I think that's a very wise thing for a leader to do, to seek expert advice.

Who's the expert advice? I think this is worth repeating. Roger Martin, an eminently qualified, respected academic, an economist, and I think he's the dean of the Rotman school of business. Who else is on there? Jim Balsillie, the president and founder of Research In Motion, one of the most successful stories in Canadian industry.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: And he's trying to buy a hockey team; I get that.

There's Tim Dattels, of Newbridge Capital; Lisa de Wilde, TVOntario; David Folk, who's from Jefferson Partners; Dr. Suzanne Fortier, who's with the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council; Gordon Homer, of Gordon J. Homer Advisory Services; David Johnston, University of Waterloo president; Mark Mullins, a respected economist; Tim Penner, Procter and Gamble, president for Canada; and Daniel Trefler for University of Toronto. These are independent experts who gave advice.

What did they tell the Premier to do, in the climate we're in, with over 200,000 jobs lost? Campbell Soup closed a plant; Dell computers are laying off thousands; the agriculture sector's hemorrhaging; the auto sector is in perilous condition, and Ms. Pupatello's over in China trying to bring some Chinese car over here. What was some of their advice?

Rather than listening to me talk, I'm going to read from a report. The title here on this report is Path to the 2020 Prosperity Agenda. You can get it online. On page 45, it says "Motivations." Their advice is, "Pursue smarter taxation." What did they say here? "The incoming government"—meaning that this was in late 2007, prior to the election—"needs to pursue tax reform as a high priority to raise Ontario's competitiveness and prosperity."

That sounds a lot more gently expressed than the expressions by Finance Minister Jim Flaherty. His was interpreted as an attack on Ontario. I think it was a wake-up call. It was a report card on the dismal conditions under Dalton McGuinty.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: The Minister of Transportation's here. But it's a moot point.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm going to page 47—Mr. Speaker, because there's a lot of heckling. This is from the report that cost over a million dollars. To the minister, as well as to the Premier: What does it say on page 47? I just turned the page and it's right here. It says, "Taxation of new business investment is higher in Ontario than nearly all OCED countries...."

Now, was Jim Flaherty wrong? Perhaps it's how he said it, not what he said. Ontario was once the engine of prosperity for Canada, and now it's the caboose. That's what he was saying. That's unfortunate. How do I know it's a caboose? Every economic report is saying it.

What's Premier McGuinty doing? He's got a bill on staying in school and the pesticide act and these little nibbly—these are nuggets. He's going to cancel the "Our Father." That's one of the big discussions: cancelling the "Our Father" in the Legislature. I think there's more important matters that he should be dealing with.

It says, "Structures: Place a premium on creativity and innovation." That is an important observation as well, because the economy is changing. I think I'm going to drive this down to everyday life. I'm a parent with five children. I believe an education is the actual harness, the fuel, for change and taking empowerment in your life. So I'm a huge believer in it. Go to school as long as you can and get skills. Education should train you for hopefully a prosperous future. But then, with prosperity, you get the responsibility. You have social responsibilities as well. So it's not all about how big a car you can get; it's about how much you can contribute back to your country and our community.

I quite honestly feel, in this whole debate—there are several important books out there. They're more or less textbooks as opposed to casual reading. One is called The World is Flat, by Thomas Friedman. You should have a look at that book. It's about globalization. It's about the transformation of the global economy through the Internet and Freenet. What it talks about—I thought there was one very clever and quite accurate line in that book; I'm trying to recall it here and generally précis it. What will be done in the new global economy in Canada, what should we prepare for—the young people, the new group of pages here? What it said is that what will be done in Canada—think about this—is what's done here: Get your teeth fixed. There will be dentists, because you can't ship your teeth over to India to get fixed, unless, of course, they're removable. That's what he said: that what will be done here is what's done here, like get your car fixed—technology, technical jobs.

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However, he went on to explain that even in Canada—Bell Canada and even some of the federal departments are call centres. If you call to get a computer fixed or serviced and you call one of the 800 numbers, you're actually speaking to Bangalore, India. Dell computers, Compaq computers, IBM computers, Bell Canada—almost every company is now moving their call centres and service centres to India. Those are jobs that were respectable opportunities for young people, certainly as an opening position.

He went on to say that almost all accounting now is being done in India, in Bangalore. They ship the data over by satellite, they do all the numbers at a lower rate of pay, I gather, and then ship all the data back. They just plug it into a form and file your tax returns. The Liberals love taxes, so probably everybody is thanking Dalton, as well as Paul Martin when he was the—my point being, though, that there is a transformation in the economy. Get ready.

What are we doing? We're out there trying to get Fiat to come over here. They're going to Italy next week, I think, the Minister of Economic Development—they're going to Fiat, but they'll only build about 5,000 cars. I think they're great little cars; I have no problem. But now they're going to bring the Zen car and the Nano car, the one that's about $2,500. Those are low-end jobs. We want to strengthen the economy of the province and the jobs and the prosperity. What's the plan? I don't see a plan here.

We've got the report from the competitiveness—"Your taxes are out of control," is what they said, and your red tape, taxes, permits, fees, inspections, where they come on your property and bingo, TSSA give you a fine for 250 bucks just for showing up. You might be an agricultural person with a diesel tank and there might be one drop of diesel fuel on a catching tray and, bingo, you get a fine. If you don't pay it, you have to get a lawyer. I think they're going about this the wrong way.

One thing that I think is very important to the individual and the family is a home, and a home that's affordable. Let's call it "shelter" in a general sense. It could be an apartment; it could be a condo; it could be whatever. I think that's fundamental.

I'm in the midst now, as the critic for municipal affairs, of looking at a report. There's a discussion going on in the background that nobody is really following, and they should. It's in the newspaper today. That discussion is about development charges. What are development charges? They used to be called levies. The member from Pickering–Scarborough East as well as Mr. Flynn from Oakville would know that development charges now on a house, a single-family dwelling, are $30,000. What are you getting for that? That's for the parks and the gazebos and the skateboard parks and the various things that municipalities love to cut the ribbons at. Meanwhile, their bridges are falling down and the roads need to be paved. But these are the fancy things. There's no glamour in repaving a road. No politicians want to be there with the asphalt and the big steamroller. They would sooner be there with the arena and Wayne Gretzky or somebody dropping the puck, that kind of stuff. They've got to get down to business and start taking care of the infrastructure of the province. I get that.

This development charge thing: Let's look at it. If I'm buying a house, I don't realize that $30,000—the developer puts the pipes in the ground and the park with the nice swings and things, which are nice, and it's $30,000. But the person buying the house says, "How come these houses are so darned expensive?" They really don't look at it logically, I think. I have a son who's just in the midst of buying a home. He's a lawyer; has a good job. His wife and their little baby are lovely people, but here's the deal, and I try to tell them, but they're not interested. They get a $200,000 mortgage. The house is $270,000, something like that. Buried in the mortgage is the $30,000. If you take the cost of money—currently about 5%—and if we have a hiccup in the economy, there will be a lot of houses with "for sale" signs.

Here's what happens. You stick the $30,000 on. Do the math. The $30,000, over 30 years, because it's tacked on at the end, is the last dollar you pay off. So you have all of the $30,000 for 30 years. That $30,000, rather an innocuous amount, probably costs you about $80,000. That's what they're adding on to your costs of shelter. And we talk about affordable housing.

Then you talk about electricity. Stay tuned. They put in your house—Dwight Duncan was the minister—a thing called a smart meter. It's anything but a smart meter.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, look. Mr. Speaker, through you, actually it is a dumb meter, because the smart meter isn't. A smart meter—there are such things, where you can actually phone your cottage or home and turn on your hot water tank or your hot tub or the heating in the house at the cottage. You can phone. That's a smart one, where it's interactive and you can remotely access it. The real issue here is that this is not a smart meter; this is a time-of-use meter. Now, stay tuned for the treachery. They have just, by regulation, changed the cost of

electricity now. If you are doing your dishes at the wrong time, it's a 100% increase in energy. That's what they're doing.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm reading the standing orders. I refer you to standing order 23. It says, "In debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she ...

"(b) Directs his or her speech to matters other than,

"(i) the question under discussion."

I've been listening to the member, Speaker, and I've heard nothing in relation to Bill 35.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I've been listening intently too.

Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: Really, what I'm trying to say is what Bill 35 does—it's kind of an innocuous bill. For the viewers, what Bill 35 is doing is giving Dalton McGuinty the privilege to, at the end of the year, take extra cash out and flush it into the economy where the ridings might be in trouble. That's basically what it is.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It's per capita.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, it'll be done per capita, as the parliamentary assistant, the member from Pickering–Scarborough East, Mr. Arthurs, says—and I have great respect for him. My point is, though, the points I'm trying to make—

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm looking at the standing orders. Under section 23, it says, "In debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she ...

"(h) Makes allegations against another member."

Then I also look to section (i), where it says, "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." I believe that the member just did that, and I would ask for your ruling.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): As a ruling on the point of order, I would ask the member to keep in mind the standing orders and not to violate them knowingly.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I want to switch topics here briefly, with your indulgence. They've just switched the standing orders. That's why there's nobody in the House. They changed the standing orders.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I mean members; there are no members in here. What is the problem with this Legislature?

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It is out of order to mention a member's absence, and he is mentioning that—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat, please. The member did not refer to any individual's absence, so he did not violate the standing orders.

Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Speaker. I know they are trying to get me off the base of talking about real content on Bill 35, but you know, the real truth is there's such apathy now. Because of these standing order changes, you can see there's no quorum of government members. There's no minister here. It's—well, there is. The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Mr. Caplan, is here.

Anyway, I'll stick to Bill 35. In 35, it says that any surplus at the end of a fiscal year, which could be around August or September—they'll find out during the fiscal year if there's any extra money left. That's a whole different debate, and I could go there, because numbers is what I like to do. I spent two or three years as chair of finance in Durham and Clarington, as well as here; I was parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the same as the member from Ajax-Pickering. So I have respect for that. What I was going to say is, anything over $600 million, at the end of the fiscal year, they can give out to municipalities. If you look at the bill, it gives the minister a minute opportunity in the regulations, at the discretion of cabinet—ultimately the Premier—to give it out.

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Remember in Quebec—I'm sensitive to these things—when Paul Martin got into trouble with the Lottogate scandal or whatever it was called there, about giving money away? This is inappropriate. There have to be very tight, strict rules, not some political manipulation. I don't go with that. I don't care if it's our party or the NDP; you've got to have very strict rules. This is public money. The integrity of all of us in this Legislature is based on doing the right thing for the right reasons at the right time. Failing to do that is failing the people of Ontario.

What is the most pressing issue in the province? I can tell you, having been elected for 25 years. Here's what I hear. There are two issues. First, the economy is going south and gaining speed. It isn't all Dalton's fault but he's got no plan to deal with it. The second issue, the top issue, is health care. And if I subdivide health care, it's seniors, chronic care, mental health and children, whether it's dyslexia or ADHD or autism. These are emotional, often diagnosable and often treatable problems, and the resources simply aren't there. To me, all of these other discussions about building skateboard parks—when we give children the proper health care and the proper diagnosis assessment, then we'll do the right thing. We'll get right to it as soon as we get enough money to build that skateboard park or that walking trail or whatever.

The Minister of Education is here, which is great. I just want to comment for a minute on that. With all due respect, she's trying to implement in education—the surplus in Bill 35 could easily go to some of the programs—

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Again, I would like to remind you that standing order 23(b) directs members to speak to the matter under debate, which is Bill 35. The member has veered quite significantly from the bill. I ask you to rule on that, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Well, it's always a matter of opinion, so I'll keep my ears and eyes open.

Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal probably should be at cabinet or something like that. There must be some meeting he could go to. He's just interrupting. He doesn't want the people of Ontario to hear the real truth.

I'm just concerned about the people of Ontario getting the real goods. In Bill 35, if there are clear, straightforward rules—I'm waiting for our member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, the critic for municipal affairs. He's excellent and he's so spot-on in his understanding of the issues. In my case, I'm more of a practical person. I like things to be transparent. We use the words "accountable," "accountability." It's not like when Mr. Colle was the Minister of Tourism or whatever and was giving away the money. That lottery-style giveaway to the cricket club was all wrong. It affects all of us. He had to resign. The auditor got into it. And the auditor is not happy with this. The auditor has commented on Bill 35. It's not part of the PSAB rules, the Public Sector Accounting Board rules.

We can't support the bill. We are interested in further discussion to find rules and ways of dealing with the real infrastructure deficit in Ontario.

If, as Mr. Flynn, the member from Oakville, said earlier, Mike Harris downloaded so much, how come Dalton McGuinty, who promised to fix it, hasn't uploaded one thing except ambulance? Now he's got what they call the fiscal service level review, under municipal affairs. That report was supposed to come out in January or February. Now it's delayed until June, and I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that report by a panel of experts—AMO and others; Doug Reycraft and those people—will be introduced during July, when people are at the cottage. And what will they do about it? It's about uploading.

You should know that that bill—I'm the critic, so I have a great deal of history in this sector. That started in 1985. I'm actually preparing a report with two academics, one from York University and one from the University of Toronto, in response to that report. I shouldn't be saying this out loud because I'm here to challenge the minister on doing the right thing. What this report says is that in 1985 the federal government at the time capped the HRDC transfer payments. That's a fact. If you don't know it, you should leave here or resign. The fact is, quite honestly, that precipitated down. At that time, in Ontario, the gas thing was in. Bill 35 fits into this because if they were really interested in responding to the Mike Harris changes that were mandatory, really, they would have uploaded some of the stuff.

Social housing? Have you got any more doctors? Is there any problem in the emergency rooms? They've increased spending by 41%. Ask yourself: Is it any better? Schools are all in deficit; in fact, they're laying off teachers. They're laying off nurses at Brampton Hospital. You look around. We've increased spending. Yes, they've done it more kindly.

Now we're talking about pesticide and all the smarmy stuff about "don't be cruel to animals" and things—who would be? But the point that I'm really making here is frightening: this touchy-feely, smarmy stuff when the economy is heading south and they're propping it up. What they're doing with Bill 35 is allowing the minister, at the end of the year, to use any surplus—who's keeping track of the numbers here?—to give out, to prop up their popularity.

It's tragic. No wonder people are cynical. You young people, especially the pages here, the newest group of pages—I'm not saying that anyone here is perfect. That includes us and it includes them. Don't be fooled by the press headlines. They're in charge, they have the gold pen to sign the big cheques and the photo ops, but how's your future looking? How's your school? They're closing the pools in Toronto; probably some of you are from Toronto. They're laying teachers off. They're closing schools. There's absolute disarray. In the Ontario prison system, there's disarray there. The Human Rights Commission, you look in the paper today and Barbara Hall is intruding on things that have no responsibility—I can't believe what's going on.

They are in their second term and when they got elected there was one issue in the election. It was something to do with faith-based schools or something. Now they're going to cancel the Lord's Prayer. That's what they're going to do. Now he's going to have hearings on it. The Premier's already said in the clippings he's cancelling it. So what are all the hearings about? It's a waste of money.

Let's get into some serious discussion about the serious challenges.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Exactly. Where is he today? I'm not supposed to say that and I understand that. But we sit here; the standing orders can't keep the people here. The ministers, I don't know where they are. They're getting their picture taken or something. There are a couple of them here. I can't believe it, and there are serious things that are going on.

This bill is going to slip through. Why? Because they're going to force it. In fact, they've time-allocated this bill. They've changed the standing orders so that nobody knows what committees are even meeting. Honest to God, I perhaps have gone on too long. I get so emotional about this, because it is our province. It is our province and I see a dim image on the horizon. When hope starts to fade, I don't know. There's more could be done.

I know our leader in the House, Bob Runciman, is always trying to find the right solution, the balance. Balance is what we need here, a little co-operation. It's a give and take. We can get there. We can get Ontario back on top, but you're going to have to listen to the suggestions from the successful advisers, the prosperity task force. You're going to have to listen to Roger Martin. You're going to have to listen to the chambers of commerce. You're going to have to listen to our opposition member, Tim Hudak, from Niagara West–Glanbrook. You're going to have to listen to the advice. We want to be responsible for good things in Ontario. We're willing

to help, but you don't seem to be prepared to listen and that's the most disheartening message of all. You're going to forge ahead with a flawed plan and take Ontario down the wrong road of tax-and-spend.

You're back again. I can't believe it.

With that, I'm going to take my chair because I'm exhausted from trying.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: See that? They're ignoring me. I've tried to make the points respectfully, but with that—

Mr. Peter Shurman: They didn't ignore you, John. You keep going.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, look, here is the bill. Here's Bill 35 and if you look at the preamble of this bill, I'm going to actually give a real accounting for it. We're all screaming about it, and they say, "Why aren't you talking more about the bill?" The bill is actually one page long. There's the bill right there. What it does is allow the minister to do pretty well what they want. It won't be Dwight Duncan, in fairness, or Ms. Pupatello, or the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, who's spending $30 billion or $40 billion on I'm not sure what. But the fact is, it gives cabinet and Dalton McGuinty the power, the gold pen, to do whatever they want, and that is a frightening prognosis for Ontario.

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Can you imagine? If there was a by-election or something, there'd probably be an announcement of some of this money, God forbid. I hope there is a by-election soon, because certainly we need more talent in the Legislature.

We moved four or five motions during hearings on this. Mr. Hudak and the members of the finance committee moved four or five amendments, all of which were turned down. These were our opportunity to improve the legislation.

I would only say to you that I have a copy of the budget. Spending is up, taxes are up, and the economy's down. That's the problem. That's what you get when you vote for the Liberals.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently for quite a period of time to the member from Durham. He did, I must admit, stray from time to time from the actual content of the bill, but he did come back towards the end and make a couple of comments that I think are worth repeating.

He was correct: Within the body of the finance committee, there were a number of motions that were made. Probably the chief motion that was made was to hear from the Auditor General, who had sent a very strong letter criticizing the bill and stating that the bill, if not amended, would cause serious implications to him, to his staff, and thus to the Legislature, because he is a servant of the Legislature. He asked to appear in person, and the members of the Liberal Party in committee unanimously voted to exclude him. I did make that motion, and I think that the member from Durham is correct: This is a disservice not only to this bill but to this House, and as a result, it may be increasingly difficult for the auditor to do his duties under the rules, which are called PSAB.

The member talked about the sad state of the economy and other things. I really don't think I should comment because it's outside the purview of the bill, but the bill itself could have been improved. And the member is absolutely right: The Liberal members in committee unanimously voted down each and every resolution that was made either by the Progressive Conservatives or the New Democrats, thus ensuring its weakness in the end.

I commend the member for at least the part of his speech that was on topic. He did capture in those phrases the gist of what was wrong.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I listened intently, I must say, to not all but a lot of the speech that was just presented by the member from Durham. He's beginning to take on some of the characteristics of the other fine actors in this place who tend to take the stage from time to time. There were some enjoyable moments in his presentation, and I'm glad I was able to be here and listen to part of it, although not all of it.

I still remain surprised at why this particular member continues to minimize the effects of significant investment in infrastructure funding in all sorts of communities across the province of Ontario. I responded yesterday in this context to the communities that I represent, places like Neebing, Oliver Paipoonge, Conmee, the city of Thunder Bay—small communities in northwestern Ontario in the riding that I represent, many of which have incredibly large land masses. Contained in that land mass, supported by very small population bases, are miles and miles of roads, bridges and community centres that these communities do not have the fiscal capacity to maintain. They seriously and very much appreciate these investments in infrastructure that we give them on an ongoing basis, not only in our last budget and through the MIII, but significant investments in infrastructure in previous years. A community like Neebing, with a population of 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 people, with multiple miles of roads and bridges, $2 million; Oliver Paipoonge, 4,000 to 5,000 people, miles and miles—or kilometres—of roads, bridges and community centres, $2 million, $3 million, $4 million over the course of the last three or four years from the McGuinty government.

These investments in infrastructure are huge in my area. It's still a mystery to me why the member from Durham for some reason wants to continue to minimize the very positive effect of these investments by our government.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to compliment the member from Durham for really a virtuoso performance in this House this morning. He covered all the details that he wanted to with respect to Bill 35 and put them in a broader context with respect to some of the other issues that are facing this House today. But unfortunately, he ran out of time and was unable to read into the record some of the amendments that our caucus brought forward. They were moved by the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook during the committee review of this Bill 35.

I know that the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook brought forward motions which would have ensured that the bill would only be effective until the end of this fiscal year, March 31, 2009. He also brought forward an amendment which would have had the effect of ensuring that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs would respect the recommendations and suggestions from the Auditor General.

Of course, the Auditor General, in a highly unusual intervention, wrote a letter to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs commenting on the bill, expressing some serious concerns. Our caucus was interested in having the Auditor General come forward and make a presentation to the committee before the committee disposed of the bill and referred it back to the House. As you know, the Auditor General is an officer of this Legislature who provides independent, neutral advice to the committees and to other aspects of the operations of the government, with an annual report every year identifying and highlighting areas where government spending needs to be drawn to the attention of the public and hopefully corrected so as to ensure that taxpayers are receiving good value for their money. We were quite disappointed when the government members of the committee voted down that request by our party to have the Auditor General come in to the committee and make representation.

Once again, I want to compliment the member from Durham for his fine presentation this morning in this Legislature. We look forward to his two-minute reply.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Members, could you come to order? We're completing some business before we transition to question period.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to add two minutes to the debate here. I listened intently, as other members did, to the member across the way who passed his opinions on the bill. I don't think I agreed with anything that was said.

I think you've got to put this bill in context and go back to the impact of some of the downloading during the years of the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves government. When you think of what happened to our schools, hospitals and highways in this province, things like sports facilities and social services, the impact of the downloading was traumatic on the operations of our communities. Towns and cities simply didn't have the ability to operate in the fashion that we've become accustomed to and provide the services to people in their communities that the people were insisting upon.

Bill 35, in my opinion, provides that plan to move forward. It gives municipalities, it gives the towns and the cities, a plan they can put some faith and some trust in, knowing that funds will flow that will allow these services to be provided in a way I know all Ontarians would like to see. It's a partnership between the provincial level of government and the local level of government.

As I said in my previous comments, it's received great support from civic leaders throughout Ontario. Look at the remarks that were made by Mayor McCallion; look at the remarks from David Miller. I'll quote one: Mayor Hazel McCallion, Toronto Star, March 13, 2008. She says, "This is just great. The province has done exactly what we asked them to do." There are not many people in this chamber who would choose to argue with Mayor McCallion. I think she knows about the operation of municipalities in a way that we simply agree with on this side of the House.

The Conservatives seem to have a different attitude to this problem. It's a problem of their own creation, I think. We're coming up with a solution. They provided the downloading; we're providing a solution to that. This bill is worthy of the support of all members.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Durham.

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Mr. John O'Toole: I thank the members for Beaches–East York, Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Wellington–Halton Hills and, more recently, Oakville. I think the key here is that this is creating, at the end of the year, a slush fund. The slush fund can be given out, according to the legislation at this time, at the will of the Premier. I'm happy that the Premier's here, and his finance minister, to know that that's what we think and that's why we can't support it.

The member from Oakville should know, having served on a regional tier of government, that there was outrage during the period after Floyd Laughren and the NDP social contract. When Mike Harris was elected to make significant changes, it was done rather hurriedly because we were hemorrhaging money at the time. The Liberals voted against a lot of that. The problem is, they talk about downloading, but they haven't uploaded anything. The fact is, it's all a plan; it's all words. They're increasing spending. Taxes are up; the economy's down. Get the message. Read the prosperity report; look at what Roger Martin is telling you. You're on the wrong road. You're going in the wrong direction. All of the indicators—200,000 jobs—this is a slush fund by any other name. It's discouraging. No wonder the people are so discouraged in the province.

I know that the Premier is trying to switch the channel. He wants to talk about the Lord's Prayer. He wants to talk about barking dogs. You're on the wrong track. Just take a breath, slow down, try to get some more doctors to come to Ontario, try to fix emergency, and try to stop schools from laying off teachers. Slow down for a minute. The economy's in trouble; you know that. What are you doing? What's the plan? I don't see any plan.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, in the east members' gallery is the mother of page Adam Russolo, Kari

Viglasky, and Adam's grandparents, John and Barb Viglasky. We welcome them.

On behalf of the member from Davenport, in the east members' gallery, Mr. John Santos, the chair of the international singing contest, as well as the 10 finalists: Andre Carneiro, Kayla De Brito, Emily Ferreira, Nancy Marques, Sandra Nogueiria, Clara Santos, Veronica Grewal, Rita Francis, Sandra da Silva and Nevia da Silva.

In the east members' gallery, on behalf of page Arjun Sawhney, Archna Kurichh, his aunt.

As well, on behalf of all members of the House, we'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate Deb Matthews, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, on the occasion of becoming a grandmother. We welcome into the world Isaac Roger Molouba.

ORAL QUESTIONS

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier and it has to do with trade apprenticeship ratios. I'm going to quote from a fact sheet from the Ontario Electrical League, just put out recently:

"Many contractors report turning away young job-seeking Ontarians on a weekly or even daily basis, not because they don't have work but because the government, through its artificially high apprenticeship ratios, does not allow them to hire these young people. The government of Ontario continues to maintain artificial barriers, the highest apprentice-journeymen ratios in Canada, to stop young Ontarians from becoming construction and maintenance electricians."

Premier, I asked you about this issue a few weeks ago. You indicated that you would look into it and take action. What have you done in the interim?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has been working on this and he'll want to speak to this momentarily, but let me just say the following: The current electrician ratio of 3 to 1 has been in place since 1991. Electrical apprentice registrations, notwithstanding that, have increased by 32% since 2003, which speaks to the effectiveness of our plan. Ratios are set by the provincial advisory committees, made up of employers and employees.

I know that in the response to the supplementary question, the minister will have more to add to this.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That's a very disappointing response, given the Premier's earlier comments on this issue. He's repeatedly said that there's nothing he can do about manufacturing job losses; in fact, he said that there are more to come.

Changing the apprenticeship ratios won't cost this government a dime. It will help move almost 200,000 people who've lost their jobs under your watch in those sectors that have labour shortages.

Yesterday, the Waterloo Record quoted Diane Gabel of Gabel Electric as saying, "The apprenticeship ratios are totally tying our hands. We can't hire."

Think of what a change in the ratio would do for communities like Listowel, where this lady's business is. They've been devastated by plant closings.

Premier, it's a no-brainer. Here's something real and immediate that you can do to address the job crisis in this province. Why isn't this a top priority for you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to stand and talk about our record in terms of apprentices. The member referenced my home community of Waterloo region. I want to inform members that yesterday I had the privilege of going to the Skills Canada-Ontario competition in Waterloo region, which is a program for young people in both high school and college to expose them to apprenticeships. Over 30,000 young people went through this program yesterday to learn about apprenticeships.

Our government made a commitment last term to increase the number of apprenticeships by 25%. This year, new apprenticeship registrations will rise to 26,000. That's 7,000 more new apprenticeships than there were in 2003, and we're on track to increase them by another 25% in the course of this mandate.

The honourable member mentions ratios. He is aware that the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This process was in place under the former Conservative government under a well-managed and booming economy.

I want to say that the ratio for electricians is 3 to 1; for drywall finishers, it's 3 to 1; for cement masons, it's 4 to 1; for carpenters, it's 4 to 1. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce recently passed a resolution calling on you to address this. No other province has such overall stringent restrictions, and this Premier and his colleagues are in no hurry to change them. Could it be because of the fund-raisers the trade unions have held for the Liberal Party of Ontario? Is this all about payback to unions, at the expense of thousands of unemployed Ontarians who can't pay their mortgages and can't feed their families? Is that what this is all about?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the member to withdraw his comments casting aspersions for reward. I would just ask him to withdraw those comments.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): And for imputing motives: I would appreciate withdrawal of those comments.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Out of respect to you, Chair, I will.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities?

Hon. John Milloy: The member is aware that ratios are regularly examined. I'd like to point out that changes

were made to ratios affecting various trades in both 2005 and 2007. Some examples: brick and stonemasons; architectural glass and metal mechanics; ironworkers, structural and ornamental; and sprinkler and fire protection installers.

I'd also like to point out that I agree with him: This process existed when his government was in office, and not a single ratio was changed under the Conservative watch.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The economy wasn't going down the toilet like it is under this government.

PREMIER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier, about pronouncements to the press over the last two weeks. Last week, during the announcement on the pesticide ban, you told the media that municipalities would still be free to bring in their own bans. In fact, the bill says the exact opposite, as we now know. The environment minister stood next to you and didn't correct you. In fact, no correction came from either the Premier's office or the environment ministry until a week later, after the press had caught on to the error.

Premier, can you explain how you could be so ill-informed about your government's own legislation? You're good at blaming others. Was it the minister's fault?

1100

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're really proud of our new legislation. I want to congratulate the minister for his leadership in this regard. We look forward to having that in place to further protect the health of Ontarians.

To speak to the specific issue raised by the leader of the official opposition, it was my mistake. I take responsibility for that. I was not adequately informed at the time in order to be able to speak to this with the full clarity that I should have been able to when we first launched this initiative. I take responsibility for that.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: If the minister was aware of the contents of the legislation, I think he would've stepped up and corrected it on the spot.

After the pesticide ban debacle, and to try to save face in light of the General Motors job losses, the Premier blurted out that a new auto plant was definitely coming to Ontario, possibly from Fiat.

The reality is that there have been no concrete talks, no commitment from any foreign automaker to bring a new plant to Ontario. The CEO of Fiat was reported saying that the ball is in the Premier's court, meaning he wants to see how many zeroes are going to be on the cheque.

Premier, why would you speak with such certainty on a new auto plant when you have no firm commitment, haven't even started having serious talks and may have jeopardized an opportunity?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll tell you why—

Hon. Michael Bryant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The first question was on pesticides. The second question was on auto strategy. One does not have anything to do with the other.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Leader of the Opposition, if you could just quickly direct how that related to the first question, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There is a thread in terms of confidence in leadership.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm pleased to take the question.

I'll tell you why I'm able to speak with such—

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, you're not; you're not pleased.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think they might have a passing interest in what I have to say.

I tell you why I speak with such confidence on behalf of Ontarians and the future prospects for our economy. When it comes to the auto sector in particular, we are really, really good at making cars. The only place they make a Lexus outside of Japan is in Ontario. GM has chosen to make its first-ever hybrid truck in Ontario. We are really good, and it's the skills of our labour, it's the quality of our workmanship that distinguishes us from any other jurisdiction. So when I say we're about to work as hard as we can to land another plant, I can speak with confidence. I know that, sooner or later, we will land another assembly plant in the province of Ontario. I'd ask my colleagues opposite to join me in expressing that kind of determination and confidence in our workers and in our province.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's called a rewriting of the facts.

Yesterday morning, when the media asked the Premier about the foot-and-mouth virus spreading across China killing young children, he professed ignorance—totally unaware. This is Emergency Preparedness Week, and this government isn't aware of a possible pandemic in a country hosting the Olympics in a matter of weeks, which will see thousands of Ontarians travelling to China.

Premier, you are clearly ill-informed regarding legislation you're trumpeting. You carelessly blurt out confidential information for short-term political gain and you're not up to speed on a potential health hazard for Ontarians—a very bad week.

Premier, given the difficult challenges this province is currently facing, how can Ontarians have confidence in your leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable friend and colleague has every right to present the case as he has. I don't share that perspective and I don't believe Ontarians do either.

Again, let's revisit this. On the first issue, I take responsibility. I should have been better informed with respect to an initiative, and I wasn't. I accept that.

On the second issue, again, I share the confidence that Ontarians have. Sooner or later we will land more investment in the auto sector in the province of Ontario.

On the third issue, there was an international issue and the member opposite feels that I should somehow be aware of all these issues at the same time. I just don't think Ontarians feel that. I'll tell you one thing: I have every confidence in my ministers and in my caucus. They all have assigned, specific responsibilities. They're well-informed on these issues. The reason I feel so confident to represent the people of Ontario as leader of their government is because I have confidence in my cabinet, I have confidence in my caucus and I have confidence in the people of Ontario.

PLANT CLOSURES

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to ask the Premier about a London company that was purchased about a year ago by a US corporation. After the purchase, the US corporation gradually reduced the number of workers to less than 50. They moved orders to the US production facilities. Now that they've reduced the workforce to less than 50 workers and the payroll to less than $2.5 million a year, the US corporation has announced the imminent closure of the plant. The US corporation gets the patents, the technology and the order books of the London company. The workers, some of whom have worked there for over 20 years, under the Employment Standards Act of Ontario, will get nothing, not even severance pay. Does this sound like a fair situation to the Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I understand that the leader of the third party indicated today that he plans to bring forward a private member's bill around this. I haven't seen that bill yet, so it's difficult for me to comment in terms of what's going to be in it. I guess the one thing I would say is that the leader of the third party may want to look at what this government is doing to try to deal with this tougher economy. Our five-point plan invests heavily in our people. I think the best thing we can do for workers across this province is to ensure that they have opportunities, when the unfortunate circumstance comes upon them to be laid off, to be able to retrain and find a job that can assist them in continuing to keep a roof over their head, feed their families and enjoy a good quality of life.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I didn't hear an answer from the Premier. I didn't hear an answer from the minister either. The reality here is this: This American company, under Ontario law, is able to get the patents, the technology and the order books. Under Ontario law, once they reduce the number of workers to under 50, they're under no obligation to pay severance. People who've worked in this facility for 25 years are out on the street—no job and not even severance pay.

My question is to the Premier. I'm going to put forward a private member's bill today that would ensure that workers like these at least get severance pay. Are the Premier and the McGuinty government prepared to support such a bill, which would speak to the unfairness these workers are facing?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I encourage the member to bring his bill forward. We haven't seen it yet. It hasn't been introduced. Certainly, as with all private members' bills, the members of this Legislature will be interested in having a look at it, and the Legislature will do with his bill what it does with all private members' bills: If it is brought forward for debate, I'm sure there'll be a thorough debate on his bill and his intention.

What I will say is that this government is working extremely hard with regard to putting forward our five-point plan to deal with these tougher economic consequences that we face. We're investing in our people. We're investing in partnerships. We're investing in infrastructure. We're investing in innovation. Our goal is to do all we can to assist workers as they're working through this tougher economic time. The Premier said over and over again—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: We've already seen the McGuinty government block the NDP's Bill 6, which would have guaranteed laid-off workers the severance and back pay owed to them by law.

This situation which happened in London is not unique. Genfast, which was the company of the year in Brantford not many years ago, was acquired by an American company. After they acquired it, they took the technology, the patents and the order books and shut down the company. At Ferranti-Packard in St. Catharines, workers were told there, "You're a productive plant, you're a cost-effective plant, but we're going to shut you down because it's cheaper, easier and quicker to lay off workers in Ontario under the Employment Standards Act than it is in Quebec or some other US jurisdictions."

This is all wrong. So I'm asking the Premier, will you support the private member's bill I'm about to introduce which will ensure that workers cannot be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

1110

Hon. Brad Duguid: What I'll ask of the leader of the third party is that he join us in the leadership that we are showing across this country when it comes to going after the federal government to ensure that they strengthen the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide greater priorities for workers who do lose their severance pay when a company goes bankrupt. We are leading that charge across this province.

I have letters from my colleagues, fellow Ministers of Labour across Canada, joining us in our effort to urge the federal government to bring forward their wage-earner protection plan, strengthen it by adding severance and termination pay to that bill, and change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide greater priority to those workers who find themselves in the unfortunate circumstance of losing their severance pay because—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, and I remind the member from Hamilton East that he should be in his seat. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: This question is for the Premier. This government claims that it wants to consult Ontarians about poverty reduction. Meanwhile, it tightly controls participation, imposes its own agenda, keeps dates and times secret from members of this House and uses security guards to keep the poor out.

One organizer of a local consultation about to be held has been ordered not to invite anti-poverty activists by members of the minister's staff. Why does this government refuse to allow low-income citizens and community activists a place in ministerial consultations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to tell you that this is an exciting time in the history of Ontario because, for the first time ever, a government has looked at the issue of poverty and has decided that existing levels of poverty are unacceptable. We are preparing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy with targets, with measures. It is a terrific committee that has been brought together across ministries.

I am out talking to people in communities. I have had wonderful conversations this week with a broad cross-section of people, including members from the Peterborough Coalition Against Poverty and the Northumberland Coalition Against Poverty. I visited a youth shelter in Peterborough.

The consultation is broad. There are many, many ways that a citizen in this province can contribute. I welcome the contribution and I ask all MPPs in the House—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I think the minister is afraid to answer the real nub of the question, and that is, why are people being excluded? The minister chooses to exclude people who have the most insight into the travails of poverty. For the past three days our office has tried to find out the starting times of future consultations, but her staff either will not return the call or refuse to tell us even when they will begin.

Why won't this minister admit that her closed-door approach is undermining public trust and alienating the very people she claims to want to help?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I find myself both troubled and confused about the position of the party opposite. They are—

Hon. Monique M. Smith: They're confusing.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: They are confusing the facts on this particular issue. The member opposite knows full well, because he has been there, that we have invited members of the public to come in. We have had a broad cross-section of people at the consultations.

The party opposite asked for an increase in social assistance rates. Every time we've introduced an increase in social assistance rates, they've voted against it. The members opposite have asked for an increase in the minimum wage. Every time we have introduced an increase in the minimum wage, they voted against it. They have been asking for increased supports for children living in poverty. When we introduced the most important improvement in supports for children living in poverty, you voted against it. You continue to vote against it.

We are engaged in a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. There are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Once again, this minister refuses to answer the question and talks. "Blah, blah, blah."

As a boy growing up in Regent Park, I saw first-hand how poverty ravages the soul and lays waste to the spirit. I saw how people like us were ignored by politicians and others, even the well-meaning, who always ended up speaking for us and about us. We were marginalized and we were never included. This minister should know how people like that feel judged and excluded, and how the poor never feel that they belong. She should know how hurtful her actions are when she tells them to communicate via e-mail and won't talk to them face to face inside the meeting. When will this minister open the process, build trust and involve the very people she claims to care about?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite has his facts wrong, and he knows he has his facts wrong, because he was there. I spent approximately half an hour outside the meetings on both occasions, talking to people. As I said earlier, I invited them in. I've also visited youth shelters, where I sat down and had dinner with kids who are in a youth shelter, to talk to them one on one about what their challenges were; I have visited the Rebound Centre, again a youth organization. The invitation list includes a broad section of people in the community, including some of the people who were protesting outside. You well know that the invitation list includes members of low-income families.

Why do you continue to stand on the sidelines and take potshots at this process? I'm asking you to get engaged in this. For the first time ever, there's an opportunity to make a contribution, and I'm asking you to do it.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Premier. Premier, it's only fair that anyone who lives or operates a business or other type of activity on land owned by the province should be required to pay rent, as this is land owned by the taxpayers of Ontario, and should certainly not be permitted to endanger children. There have been a lot of different answers given by your ministers on this, so I'd like to ask the Premier today, with respect to the

property on Argyle Street in Caledonia, has there been an eviction notice sent and has it been acted upon?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I say to the member again, in answer to this question, that this is on a right-of-way adjacent to a highway. It's not on the reserve, it's not on the DCE lands; it is something that has caused concern amongst not only Caledonia townsfolk and people across this province but also people within the Haudenosaunee Six Nations. I know that the band council chief and council have expressed their concerns about it and have condemned it. There's no question that it is incredibly unhelpful for the relationship between the townsfolk, the government and the Haudenosaunee Six Nations. The way to resolve it, as the Premier has said many times, is to negotiate a resolution, and that's what we're trying to do.

Ms. Laurie Scott: On April 29, the minister who just spoke said that the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal had issued an eviction notice to the vendor operating on Argyle Street, on crown land, some weeks ago. He then stated that the notice was sent by a third party. My question would then be to explain why, in your capacity, you think it's acceptable for a third party to send an eviction notice to an illegal operation on government-owned property.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, I'm sure the member would like to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem; I know the member would want to be a part of the solution. The solution is going to be through, firstly, improving the relationship in a community that's extremely divided right now. It used to be the case that the communities of Caledonia and Haudenosaunee Six Nations were living together in relative harmony, shopping together in the same stores and going to the same Tim Hortons, and now they've become significantly divided. As a result of that, what we are trying to do is bring the communities back together. It is a 200-year-old dispute between Haudenosaunee Six Nations and the federal government. Ultimately, the province is going to do its job to try and do everything we can to resolve it. I know that the member would want to talk to her federal counterpart, and particularly the MP for that area, to try to get the federal government to make a contribution as well.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Il y a plus d'un an de cela, le ministre nous a promis that he would mandate a minimum standard of care by regulations instead of including it in Bill 140. He then delayed the implementation of minimal standards by appointing Shirlee Sharkey to study the issue. In Saturday's Toronto Star, the minister's press secretary said that the Sharkey report would be completed this week. Has the minister received the report and, if he has, could he tell us what it says about minimum standards of care in long-term care?

1120

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I have not received the report but would want members of the House to know that upon receipt of the report, it will be in the public domain and made available for all of us to benefit from it.

I don't agree with the assertion the honourable member makes. It's not a delaying tactic. It's a tactic that's designed to ask someone quite esteemed in health care to give us some advice about best implementation in terms of enhancing training and education standards for those who are providing support in the long-term-care environment. I think the report will be very beneficial, but I'm not certain what advice it's going to offer, particularly around the standards that the honourable member suggests.

I can tell the honourable member that, through our budget projections, we anticipate by the end of the mandate having paid hours of care at 3.25 on a daily basis, a very substantial bit of progress over what we inherited and an appropriate investment given the needs of the vulnerable residents of long-term-care homes.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Back in 2007, everyone who appeared in front of the committee on Bill 140 urged the government to enact a minimum standard of care. At the time, the minister dismissed the idea, saying that a minimum standard of care would treat people like "widgets," I think is the word. He finally bowed to public pressure, but the reality is there is no minimum standard of care in long-term care. Will the minister commit today to implement a minimum standard of care in long-term care?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member apparently hasn't been too particularly well informed about the way we're going about that. It was through an amendment that was brought forward in the legislative process that brought Ontario back to minimum standards, with one difference: We don't want to have a circumstance where we pretend, or ask long-term-care workers to pretend, that the needs of every resident are identical. We want to make sure there's sufficient flexibility so that the hours of care are not distributed necessarily exactly equally if the needs of one individual are greater than another.

This is the bias we have. Shirlee Sharkey's report will give us good advice around that. I think it's exciting to be back in a situation where we will have these standards in place. They were in place at one time at a much lower level when your party was the government of Ontario, and that party eliminated them.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is to the Minister of Education. Spending hard-earned tax dollars wisely is at the top of my constituents' priority list. They want to know that they are getting good value for their money

and that funds are being spent prudently and wisely. In no area is this more important than when it comes to their children's education. That's why the steps our government has taken to improve accountability and increase transparency in fiscal management are important to them.

But earlier this year, my constituents were concerned about expenditures at the TCDSB and want to know that public funds are being spent in the best interests of our students. I know the minister appointed an investigator to review these issues and I would ask her to update the House on the status of this investigative report.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear with board trustees that they're expected to make spending decisions in a transparent and accountable fashion and that I and this government will tolerate no less.

In December 2006, through the Ministry of Education, we put guidelines in place that set a high standard for reporting. In February, because there seemed to be some residual concerns in consultation with the chair of the Toronto Catholic board, I appointed Mr. Hartmann to go into the board and look at some of the expenses, some of the issues. That report has come back to me today. I have received it and I will share copies with the critics opposite.

The blueprint in the report is an excellent one for boards to eliminate inappropriate reimbursements, inappropriate expenses and the use of public dollars for private advantage. I fully expect that the board will be implementing these recommendations. As I have said, I have no patience, nor does this government have any patience, for any behaviours that will undermine public confidence in publicly funded education.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Minister, as you've said, public confidence is key to creating communities that are committed to maintaining and improving publicly funded schools, where 95% of Ontarian students attend.

Questionable expenses erode public confidence, especially in light of the significant investments that our government has made. I would ask the minister what steps she's going to take to ensure that the appropriate checks and balances are in place to allow my constituents to have confidence that their increased investments in public education are being spent prudently and appropriately.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll be taking immediate action. I expect the board to implement the report's recommendations. I'm writing to the board today to ask them to confirm in writing, by May 21, its plan and timeline for implementing the recommendations. I'm also asking that the board file its amended policies no later than June 30 of this year, and I'll be sending in an auditor to work directly with individual trustees on some of the questionable reimbursements that remain.

On a provincial level, I'm going to be consulting with trustee associations, because I think some of the findings of this report have implications across the province. What I want to do is to strengthen the oversight and accountability practices. It is incumbent upon all elected officials to make sure that allocation of public funds is done in the most transparent way, in keeping with accepted practices. I will be working with the trustee associations.

As I have said, there is no patience and no tolerance within this government for any practices that will undermine publicly funded education.

ANIMAL PROTECTION LEGISLATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. As you know, Minister, many Ontarians feel that Bill 50 is badly flawed. Stakeholders are inundating our offices, concerned about flaws in this bill, and they are worried about potential flawed regulations.

Minister, I asked you a question three weeks ago, and on that day you didn't really answer the question. Perhaps you didn't understand it, but I'll ask it again: Will you commit to this House today that during the drafting of regulations relating to Bill 50 you will include representatives from hunting, fishing and agricultural organizations and use their expertise in drafting regulations for Bill 50?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We're very proud of the process we're using with Bill 50. Before we introduced it for first reading, we had widespread consultation from the stakeholders that the member spoke about, but other stakeholders as well. We look forward to second reading being completed and then we look forward to bringing this bill to committee for extensive consultation.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It sounds like you're not going to include hunting and fishing and agricultural organizations in the drafting.

Another major flaw in this bill is the inclusion of section 6. Humane societies across Ontario believe that, if enacted, section 6 will strip them of their names. As the Toronto Humane Society says—and that's an institution that's over 120 years old—"It's like losing your name; it's like losing your identity." Minister, will you stand today in this House and commit to either removing or making major amendments to section 6 of Bill 50?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, we're very proud of the legislation we introduced. We're even prouder of the process that we're going to use with regard to our intent, our desire and our commitment to have extensive committee hearings for this bill. We want to hear from the stakeholders. We want to hear from those directly involved. We want their opinions and we want their ideas, and certainly the committee will give those opinions and those ideas fair consideration.

ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Ontarians are now being advised not to appeal environmentally destructive planning decisions to the OMB for fear of being sued by very deep-pocketed developers. Why does the McGuinty government sit on its hands while Geranium Corp. slaps

concerned citizens trying to protect the Lake Simcoe environment with $3.6 million in OMB hearing costs?

Hon. Jim Watson: As the particular matter the member raised is before the OMB, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on that specific case. But I can tell you that the OMB, of course, is authorized to award costs. It does so very rarely and only when someone's conduct is deemed to be clearly unreasonable, frivolous or in bad faith. The ability to award costs is to help ensure that the process is fair for all by discouraging unreasonable conduct.

One of the things I'm proud of that our government has implemented with respect to OMB reforms is the creation of the citizen liaison office. Members may know that citizens can contact the citizen liaison office or visit the OMB website. I'll give you the phone number: It's 1-866-887-8820. It's an opportunity for this citizen liaison office to assist members of the public in terms of issues they have before the OMB. It is additional assistance to individuals appealing before the OMB, and it's something I would hope members of the public would take advantage of.

1130

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Websites and help phones just don't cut it in this environment. Geranium Corporation's intimidation tactics at the OMB have already resulted in the Concerned Residents of Hillsdale deciding not to appear at the OMB opposing massive Geranium development in their town.

Leaders like Quebec, however, and British Columbia, already have legislation that's aimed at ensuring big-money interests don't use courts to muzzle public participation. When is the McGuinty government going to stop protecting the big developers and introduce OMB reform in this province that ensures local citizens aren't slapped with multi-million-dollar lawsuits when they act to protect their own environment?

Hon. Jim Watson: Again, I can't comment on the specific issue because it is before the OMB. But under my predecessor, the current Minister of the Environment, we undertook probably the most comprehensive reform of the Ontario Municipal Board in the last 25 years. In fact, we have made it better, we've made it fairer and we've made it more transparent. One of the things we've done is encouraged all parties to ensure that decisions and information are brought to the front of the process as opposed to midway through, so it allows individual citizens a fairer chance of having their case heard before the OMB.

We've also instituted, as I've mentioned, the citizen liaison office, we've eliminated the applicant's right of appeal to the OMB when a municipality does not support an application that relates to an urban boundary expansion, and new power for the OMB to dismiss repeat applications without a full hearing.

The fact of the matter is that we have listened to community association groups. I know, as a former city councillor and a mayor myself, I understand—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NORTHERN ONTARIO HERITAGE FUND

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. My question regards investments by the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. As members of the House know, the McGuinty government is making significant investments in northern communities and businesses through the NOHFC. However, members of this House may not know that the fund actually offers six unique funding programs to create sustainable jobs for northerners and foster economic opportunity across all of northern Ontario. This fund, through such avenues as the emerging technology fund, provides important investment in the future viability of northern communities and businesses. Increasingly, whether it be health care, education, business solutions or social networking, people need to be connected.

Would the minister tell the House, what are your programs doing to achieve this important goal?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to thank the member for Algoma–Manitoulin for the question.

Certainly, my colleague is absolutely right: Being connected is hardly an option anymore in today's just-in-time society. That's why I'm so proud of our government's investments through the northern Ontario heritage fund towards developing broadband and cellular coverage throughout the north. Again, complimenting my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin, he understands full well that in terms of attracting economic investment and maximizing the tourist potential, we need to upgrade our cellular and broadband service. As a result of that, in early 2007, we refocused the emerging technology program, with the goal of making investments to bring broadband Internet and cellular service to all of northern Ontario over the next three years. I'm happy to report that since coming to office in 2003, we've invested more than $45 million through the NOHFC in 20 telecommunications projects across the north.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: These are very important and significant investments in the riding of Algoma–Manitoulin and across all of northern Ontario. We are all excited to see that the government is initiating a lofty plan and goal—pan-northern in its reach—which will bring cellular and broadband coverage to all of northern Ontario.

I'm confident that these investments will develop capacity that will have a real impact on the way that northerners learn, how our businesses compete and how our people interconnect. This has already proven important in Algoma–Manitoulin through the work we've done on Highway 17, and also through places like Chapleau, which has brought cellular towers to places that never would have had them before.

Minister, I know the NOHFC board has met recently. I would be interested to know what new investments in broadband we are about to see in northern Ontario.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you again for the question. I'm certainly pleased to report to the House that

at our last board meeting a number of important projects were approved. I look forward to announcing those investments in the near future—as well as my colleagues all across the north.

To date, under the McGuinty government, the NOHFC has invested over $338 million towards more than 1,600 projects in the north. This has leveraged more than $1 billion in additional investments and will help create or sustain approximately 9,800 jobs. It's important to know that we are investing in every riding right across the north.

I'm talking about such significant investments as the $1 million for the Discover Abitibi project in Timmins and the $2 million for the Sioux Lookout downtown revitalization plan. These are great community projects that we're very proud to be a part of. I look forward to continuing this great work as we increase the NOHFC from $60 million to $100 million a year, annually.

MOOSE TAGS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, recently the auditor did a report expressing some strong concerns regarding the moose problem in the province of Ontario. You have initiated a review throughout the province.

The concerns from the initial meetings at the review are that it's more of a sales pitch program than it actually is for gaining input. The concerns from these individuals who have been in attendance at these meetings is that the dialogue has been shut down and directed towards specific programs to come forward. Minister, can you assure us that the review will actually take input, that there will be a report and that that report will be submitted for a total review?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to thank the member from Oshawa for the question. You're absolutely correct. The Auditor General did determine that there were concerns around the moose allocation and the moose program. That program has actually been in place for 28 years, so it was time for it to be reviewed.

Without question, I will assure the member that the consultation that will take place will be meaningful consultation. It will be open and accessible. It will be put in place so that people feel that what they're speaking to and about is taken directly into the concerns that have been expressed around the programs.

I will assure the member that that will occur. Those stakeholders include aboriginals, hunters and anyone else. In addition to that, I'm asking that every member in this House will also receive a copy of that review so that they too can make some comments for input.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I know the minister has a strong concern and will move forward with that to ensure that it's direct input. One of the concerns that has come forward is that by 2010, the intention of the ministry would be to move forward with greater or province-wide calf tag allocation and/or a spike-horn bull allocation.

Minister, can you assure the province that the decisions haven't been made and that you're actually going to move forward and seriously consider some of the other options that may be potentially put forward? As well, when you're moving forward with this, this year, why don't you use include licensing? When the licences are issued, the tag allocation is issued. Why don't you include a survey at that time, to survey those individuals who will be recipients, to gain further input?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: That's a really good idea. I will take that further. The other is that you cannot make a decision until you have the data. We have to collect good data, and we're just in the process of doing that.

What's challenging, obviously, is ensuring that the data is correct for each of the different wildlife units. Until that data is done, no decision will be made. Until that data is accurate, no decision will be made on any of those allocations. I can assure the member that nothing will occur until the data is in hand.

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Minister of Health: The Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Community Care Access Centre is currently restructuring. Its plan means that the local community will lose the walk-in, face-to-face client services that so many of our most vulnerable residents have come to rely upon. What's happened to the promise this government made to deliver health care services as close to home as possible?

Hon. George Smitherman: Home care, which is what CCACs do, is delivered right in the home. I think that the honourable member is trying to make a case for which it's difficult to make one. If care delivered in the home is the ultimate goal—and that's what CCACs do—then I think we can all conclude that they're still fulfilling that mission.

I'm very privileged to be associated with a government that's seeing that mission extend, carry, capture and support about 100,000 additional Ontarians. I assume that from time to time, organizations will take a look at the way they are modeling their service delivery and seek to ensure that it's most effective and most efficient. We're seeking at all times to make sure that we're taking best advantage of resources available from the taxpayers in Ontario. In this case, to the very best of my knowledge, that was the instinct associated with the decision.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: The McGuinty government is treating nurses, like the ones employed by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant CCAC, as nothing more than pawns in its budget chess game. Consolidating five local intake offices into one in the farthest corner of the CCAC boundary removes nurses from their local accessible community office and hinders their ability to build patient relationships which are vital to improve health outcomes. Why won't this government treat these nurses and their patients with the respect they deserve by saying no to this restructuring process?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think it's noteworthy that the honourable member's bias in his question was about the service delivery model from the employees' standpoint. This is of course an important consideration, but CCACs are primarily in the business of working on behalf of clients with a view towards providing services to them in their own homes. This is the mandate, the mission and the mode of service delivery for home care. CCACs coordinate that, and our government is responsible for making sure that CCACs have more and more resources to expand the quality of their mission.

There's been a realignment in some of the administrative support that coordinates that care. I'm sure that it does create challenges and perhaps some hardship for individuals, and we apologize for it, but the orientation of these community care access centers must at all times be on enhancing access to services for clients, and that's what they're doing.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. David Orazietti: My question is for the Minister of Labour. As you know, this is North American Occupational Safety and Health Week. The importance of a safe and healthy work environment is an issue of concern for all Ontarians. I know the minister has taken the time to come to Sault Ste. Marie, visit the provincial claims centre and speak with the employees who provide this very important service to workers across Ontario, and I want to thank the minister for that.

Minister, can you elaborate on the steps we have taken to improve the health and safety of workers across Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you to the member for the question and for hosting me when I did have the opportunity to visit the Soo. I can tell you, I was very inspired in visiting that claims centre. The workers there are very dedicated to building a health and safety culture, not only in Sault Ste. Marie but right through the whole region of that part of our province. I thank the member for his leadership in that region and for helping us to accomplish that.

Indeed, North American Occupational Safety and Health Week began May 4 and runs to May 10. Each year during this week, health and safety advocates and organizations across North America promote awareness of workplace health and safety through local, provincial and national events. I know we see a lot of these weeks in our time. It seems like every week is special in some way, shape or form, but what could be more important than promoting healthy and safe work environments across this province?

Mr. David Orazietti: The health and safety of all workers in Ontario is something I know our government is committed to further improving. I understand your ministry has hired hundreds of new inspectors and placed a renewed focus on enforcing compliance with the Occupational Health And Safety Act, because no one should have to worry about whether they'll arrive home safely. Minister, can you explain specifically what you are doing to help reduce workplace injuries in Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is quite right: We have hired 200 additional new occupational health and safety inspectors, which brings it up to a total of 430. We've almost doubled the number of occupational health and safety inspectors. These inspectors are fully trained in the field of ensuring safe work environments. When they go out into the workplace, they are making a difference. In fact, they visited 21,000 workplaces in the last year alone. That's a lot of work being accomplished on our behalf to make our work sites across this province healthier and safer.

What do we accomplish by working with all of our partners in this field? Fifty thousand workers have now been spared the pain and suffering caused by a workplace injury. That is something that benefits the workers and it's something that benefits families, and it contributes about $5 billion in costs that would have been accrued to our economy.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is for the Minister of Energy. As Minister of Energy, you have directed the Ontario Power Authority to build a natural-gas-powered generating station in northern York region. My constituents want to know, why do you want to build this station in the middle of one of their communities?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Thank you for the question—a very legitimate one. I would say to you and the people of Ontario that we have a very well developed 20-year plan for energy. It starts with conservation, I might say—that's where we always start—doubling renewables and maintaining our nuclear fleet, but one thing we require is periodically some generating power to meet our peaks. This plan is called the IPSP plan, and this particular development you're talking about is included in it. It is clear that the rapidly growing area that you represent in northern York region does require some generation power. It's clearly in our plan.

You are right: We have asked the Ontario Power Authority to secure that power. It is going to be required in your area to make sure we keep the lights on—well, not keep the lights on, but that we have a good supply in your area to meet the needs of your area.

Mrs. Julia Munro: My constituents are concerned that this station will harm the environment. Will you guarantee that any proposal for a new generating station will undergo a full environmental assessment before a single shovel goes into the ground?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Again I, for your constituents, repeat that the need in this particular plan, as I say, is included in Ontario's 20-year plan. By the way, I might add that it's up for public hearings before the Ontario Energy Board, so that there are opportunities for comment on that.

Certainly any plant requires the necessary approvals, including municipal approval on zoning. Our plan will

meet the environmental requirements of the province of Ontario and the zoning requirements of the province of Ontario. As I say, it is part of our integrated power supply program that is required to ensure that we have a reliable and affordable supply of electricity and that it's done, I might say, in the most environmentally sensitive way we possibly can. But it is required in your area to make sure that people can feel confident about the future supply of electricity.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Jared Osidacz's young life was brutally taken two years ago at the hands of his father, a convicted spousal abuser. Instead of a stand-alone inquest into Jared's death, the coroner has decided to join Jared's inquest with the mandatory inquest into the death of his father, who was shot by police in attempting to murder Jared's mother, Julie Craven. Jared's case merits a stand-alone inquest. Why won't the Premier commit to this?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'm happy that, finally, the inquest has been called. We all have been assured by the chief coroner that there will be an extensive investigation inquest. Hopefully, it will provide some of the answers to Jared's mother and grandmother that will finally give them some closure.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The minister has the power to do the right thing here, and all we're asking is that that get done. He has the ability, vested in him by the Coroners Act, to call any inquest he wants if he thinks it's in the public interest. An inquest into the violent death of yet another child at the hands of a spousal abuser should meet that test of being in the public interest. Instead of merely postponing the joint inquest, which is what's happening now—a postponement of the previously called joint inquest until the fall—why doesn't the minister immediately announce a stand-alone inquest into Jared's death?

1150

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I have every confidence that both the grandfather and the mother will get the answers that they're looking for. The chief coroner certainly wants that to happen as well. As that inquest unfolds, there will be recommendations made that I think we can all learn from. I believe in the process. I would hope that the process, as I said earlier in my first answer, provides some closure and some answers to a mother who's hurting and a grandfather who's hurting.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. In my community of Hamilton, both McMaster University and Mohawk College are experiencing high enrolment rates as a result of their strong track record of success. Ontario has one of the highest post-secondary enrolment rates in the G8. Post-secondary enrolment is up 25% in Ontario since 2004, with 100,000 more students attending college or university. With more students in our classrooms, what is the government doing to ensure that students are being served in the best facilities and learning environments?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the member for the question. I want to commend her, along with her colleague the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, for their advocacy for post-secondary education in the Hamilton area with its two fine, outstanding institutions: McMaster and Mohawk.

The growing enrolment rates in our post-secondary institutions are a sign that the Reaching Higher plan, the largest investment in 40 years, is working, and I've been very pleased with subsequent investments that have followed on. In our most recent budget, we announced $970 million over three years towards our post-secondary institutions. In fact, in the community of Hamilton, McMaster University and Mohawk College received over $26 million already this year to improve, maintain and upgrade their campus facilities so that students have access to safe and modern learning environments. I think we all recognize, as teachers and faculty have, that we have to have outstanding learning environments.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Investing in our students is imperative in Ontario to continue to be a driving economic force. I'm proud to belong to a government that recognizes the importance of ensuring that our students today are the centre of our economic tomorrow.

In this increasingly globalized economy, Ontario is competing with the world, and we need to ensure that we are ready for the challenge. Minister, can you tell me what we are doing today to provide the students of McMaster University and Mohawk College with the opportunities to excel and compete in today's diverse economy?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I thank the member and acknowledge her advocacy and that of the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of accompanying the Premier to Mohawk College to announce an investment of nearly $20 million to support the McMaster-Mohawk bachelor of technology partnership. This investment will expand classroom and lab space for students. Construction is expected to start this year.

Members should learn about the BTech program. The BTech program combines engineering technology with management skills learning in a co-op environment. The graduates of this course provide highly skilled technological and management leadership, and are sought after in the Hamilton area for the outstanding contribution they can make in the workplace. Not only is this a great program, but it's a wonderful example of our community colleges and universities working together to provide the types of workers we need to make sure that the Ontario economy continues to thrive.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to ask all members to welcome a number of guests in the Speaker's gallery today: His Excellency Bruno Rodriguez, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba; His Excellency Ernesto Senti, Cuban ambassador to Canada; Mrs. Josefina Vidal, head of the North American division of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Laureano Cardoso, Consul General of Cuba in Toronto; and Mr. Noel Quesada, assistant to the first deputy minister.

Welcome to our guests from Cuba today.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the Lord's Prayer and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that concerns fairness for Ontario workers, and specifically employment insurance. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at $54 billion; and

"Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets $4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus, unemployed are not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end this discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

Since I agree with this petition 100%, I am delighted to sign it.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition in respect to issues that are before the Legislature. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Provincial Animal Welfare Act calls forth the Ontario SPCA, a private charity, whose object is to facilitate and provide for the prevention of cruelty to animals and their protection and relief therefrom; and

"Whereas every inspector and agent hired and trained by this private charity has and may exercise any of the powers of a police officer; and

"Whereas this private charity does not answer to the Ombudsman or the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Ontario SPCA is not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and no external mechanism of accountability exists; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refused to investigate the desperate plea of 29 resigned directors demanding that the Ontario SPCA be stripped of police powers; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government proposes sweeping reforms to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act granting further extraordinary powers to the Ontario SPCA, including the power of warrantless entry;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to investigate allegations of abuse of police powers and charter violations by the Ontario SPCA investigators; and

"(2) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to explore the need for an external mechanism of accountability for the Ontario SPCA; and

"(3) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to ensure that proposed changes to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act do not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

It goes on. I am pleased to sign and support this, and present it to Cali, one of the new pages.

DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY

Mr. Reza Moridi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the David Dunlap Observatory in Richmond Hill is of historical and heritage significance;

"Whereas the land was donated in trust by the Dunlap family to the University of Toronto in 1935, and the pre-Confederation farmhouse is still standing;

"Whereas the observatory, featuring the largest optical telescope in Canada, has been the site of scientific discoveries; it has been a place of learning not only for students of the University of Toronto, but for the general public as well;

"Whereas the observatory has been recently declared by the University of Toronto as 'surplus' to its academic needs, and subject to sale for development;

"Whereas the observatory occupies an incredibly unique and beautiful 180 acres of green space, the largest such space in the town of Richmond Hill, with trees, birds, animals, plants, insects and butterflies in the middle of a rapidly urbanized area;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect such a property of such historical, scientific and natural significance" from being used for commercial development.

Mr. Speaker, I present to you today about 300 signatures, which were presented to me during the rally held at Queen's Park on January 16, and I'll sign this petition.

1200

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition signed by about 150 of my constituents, and it concerns the Lord's Prayer.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We at St. Andrews in Fergus are very much aware that many churches and individuals have written to your government voicing their concern about the possible exclusion of the Lord's Prayer from the opening of the daily proceedings.

"Our concern is genuine, not because we wish to impose our Christian beliefs on anyone, nor do we want the government to be seen as the indirect route used to try to try to accomplish this imposition. Rather, we view the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in the Legislature as public acknowledgment of the Christian principles espoused by those who were the founding fathers of Canada.

"Canada is a relatively young country, settled by people who wanted a country that would treat its citizens in a fair and just manner—principles held by Christians and extended to all who would seek to make Canada their home. The Legislature is the manifestation of these Christian principles, just and fair decisions for the betterment of all citizens.

"The Lord's Prayer reminds us that we have not forgotten those principles, nor those who shared their wisdom with us.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"On behalf of the members and adherents of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Fergus, whose signatures are attached, we ask that the recitation of the Lord's Prayer remain a vital and traditional part of the Ontario Legislature."

I support this petition and have affixed my signature to it as well.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to present this petition on behalf of a number of residents from the riding of Niagara Falls, including Leona Dempsey:

"Whereas the government is proposing to remove the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature each and every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support the petition, and I'm pleased to sign it.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank the members of Alliston Pentecostal Church for sending me this petition.

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I agree with this petition, and I'm signing it.

HOME CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition from the Service Employees International Union and the people of Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma.

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care

delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;...."

They petition the Ontario government:

"(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I fully support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it with page Joanna.

Mr. John O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm wondering if there's a quorum in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Would the table determine if there's a quorum?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Quorum is now present.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition from residents of Ajax–Pickering.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network ... board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum ... birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas, with the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: A petition headed "Freeze Gas Prices.

"Whereas gasoline prices have increased at alarming rates during the past year; and

"Whereas the high and different gas prices in different areas of Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship on hard-working Cambridge families; and

"Whereas the false promises of Premier McGuinty adversely affect the trust between Ontarians and their elected representatives;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That the McGuinty" Liberal "government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate; and

"(2) That the" Ontario "McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario."

As I agree with this, I'll affix my signature.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: This petition is in respect to Bill 56, a private member's bill regarding firearms in vehicles, introduced by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. There have been a number of petitions accordingly. This one reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the

number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

As I agree with this petition, I'll affix my signature to it and send it off with page Peter.

ALMA COLLEGE

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas historic Alma College, designed in the High Victorian Gothic style, chartered by an act of Ontario passed March 2, 1877, opened in October 1881, located in the city of St. Thomas, county of Elgin, province of Ontario, has fallen into a dire state of disrepair; and

"Whereas Alma College continues to be threatened with demolition by its current owners despite the efforts of many concerned citizens, alumni and various officials; and

"Whereas a historical plaque commemorating Alma College was unveiled at the college on Thursday, October 28, 1976, by the Ontario Heritage Trust, an agency within the Ministry of Culture and Recreation; and

"Whereas the city of St. Thomas designated Alma College under part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act (bylaw 167-94), in 1994; and

"Whereas recent amendments (2005) to the Ontario Heritage Act allow the Minister of Culture to designate property as being provincially significant;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Culture immediately designate Alma College as a building of provincial significance and, in the event of a demolition order being issued for Alma, to immediately intervene by issue of a stop order, and to further identify provincial partnerships and possible funding to protect the existing buildings from further deterioration while financial resources are generated to restore the property to its former glory."

As I agree with this petition, I have affixed my signature and given it to page Sheilagh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The time for petitions has expired. This House is now recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1212 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CITY OF OTTAWA

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm proud to be a representative from the city of Ottawa. For a second year in a row, MoneySense magazine has picked Ottawa as the number one city to live in—to live, to work and to invest. All you have to do is stroll along through Dickinson Square, the most historic site in Nepean–Carleton, go shopping in the Byward Market or skate on the Rideau Canal and you'll understand why Ottawa tops even 154 other communities as the best city to live in, in all of Canada.

We may have long, freezing winters and a very quiet nightlife, particularly in Nepean–Carleton, but we have beautiful parks, great trails, great museums and one of the best hockey teams in all of the world, the Ottawa Senators.

We are also Canada's largest agricultural city. My riding of Nepean–Carleton is home to many of the greatest farms in this great country.

But we also have many young urban and suburban dwellers, whether in Barrhaven, Manotick, Greely, Metcalfe, North Gower, Kars, Osgoode or Edwards.

Ottawa is a bright city. It's one of the world's safest and most beautiful communities in which to live, work, learn and raise a family. The city prides itself on its quality of life, and I am proud that it has been recognized by MoneySense magazine. Ottawa offers a bright future for all, whether you reside in the suburban, rural or urban community.

TOWNSHIP OF WELLESLEY

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I rise today to highlight one of the townships in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, as well as one of our Kitchener teams.

The riding of Kitchener–Conestoga includes three townships: Woolwich, Wilmot and Wellesley. Today I would like to recognize the township of Wellesley as one of the pillars in the rural component of this riding.

I'd like to thank Mayor Ross Kelterborn and his councillors, Shelley Wagner, Herb Neher, Jim Olender and Paul Hergott, and CAO Susan Duke for their dedication and hard work on behalf of Wellesley township.

With 211 kilometres of roads, 34 bridge structures and just under 28,000 hectares, the township continues to struggle to find support for preserving our precious resources of agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas. This government's MIII grant of $2.284 million represents an amount almost equal to the amount the township generates in taxation in one year. To put aside this amount of money to repair the Hawkesville Road would have taken 13 years. This government's continued commitment to our rural Ontario helps preserve the heritage of Wellesley township.

On a second note, on behalf of the constituents of Kitchener–Conestoga, we'd like to show our continued support to the Kitchener Rangers major junior A hockey club for the outstanding achievement by our young athletes. We're proud of their hard work, their commitment, their dedication, their families and their friends.

CORONER'S OFFICE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I rise today to tell members of this Legislature about a family in my riding and how this government has made a devastating and stressful situation worse. Robert and Wendy Flint of Stittsville lost their 24-year-old son last August 4 in an accidental

overdose. These grieving parents are still waiting for the autopsy report. The regional coroner has been waiting for the toxicology report to be completed in Toronto. Apparently, these tests have finally been done, nine months later, but the Flints have now been told it will take up to two more months before they receive the final report.

The Flint family is understandably having a difficult time dealing with the death of their son, and the wait for the autopsy report is only making things worse. Mr. Flint told me, "It is heartless and totally inconsiderate of a ministry of the government to put such unnecessary strain on families. It's stressful enough losing a child without adding the stress of not being able to find some sort of closure."

I call upon the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Servicse to review the operations of the coroner's office to ensure that no families have to go through the torture of waiting this long for the autopsy report on a loved one.

ALMA COLLEGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to request that the Minister of Culture use part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act to preserve Alma College, in St. Thomas. The Ontario Heritage Act gives the Minister of Culture the power to ensure its ongoing protection through the enactment of provincial heritage designation. She also has a heritage budget that could be used to help develop a solution to the college's long-term existence.

Alma College amply satisfies the criteria set out in Ontario regulation 10/06 for determining cultural heritage value and provincial significance, including its representation of the theme of education in Ontario's history and its reflection of the province's cultural heritage.

I urge the Minister of Culture to use her powers to designate and protect this historic and iconic property before it is too late. I ask her, given the powers she has, if this building is not worth preserving, which building in Ontario is worth preserving?

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Mike Colle: I would like to let members of this House and the people of Ontario know about the amazing work being done in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence and throughout the city of Toronto by the men and women in the police service and their community mobilization partners. I would like to make a special mention of the excellent officers in 32 division, under Inspector John Wallace and 13 division, under Inspector David McLeod, who have developed a program, called the community mobilization program, in partnership with local residents to make communities safe, as a component of what they call the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy, or TAVIS; in short, to reduce violence and bring neighbours together to keep communities safe.

I'm proud to say that our government invested $10 million in the TAVIS program to combat crime. In Eglinton–Lawrence and throughout Toronto, community mobilization is a most effective way of bringing people in our neighbourhoods, businesses and government services together with police to combat crime.

I would hope that this House will also support taking away guns from criminals who drive around neighbourhoods with guns in their cars. I would like to thank members for supporting that initiative and supporting the 9,000 men and women in Toronto under Chief William Blair who keep our communities and our schools safe, and make sure Toronto is one of the best places in the world to live, and that the one-percenters do not destroy our good neighbourhoods. Down with the one-percenters

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I rise in the House, on behalf of the PC caucus, to support retaining the Lord's Prayer in the proceedings each day. As a member of the all-party committee looking at the opening proceedings, I'm proud to represent the PC caucus and those who wish to retain the Lord's Prayer. However, it appears that the Premier, in his comments to the media, is determined to remove the Lord's Prayer no matter what the recommendations of the committee are.

Mr. Speaker, you are aware that there was absolutely no movement by any organization, religious or otherwise, to remove the Lord's Prayer from the opening proceedings. At a time when Ontarians face critical family physician shortages, a record number of smog days, over 200,000 lost manufacturing jobs and skyrocketing fuel costs, we as parliamentarians are wasting valuable time and tax dollars opening up a discussion that needs not be discussed. I believe that the Premier wants the discussion to be a diversion from his lack of leadership and the incompetence and unaccountability of his government.

People have constantly reminded me that the Premier is trying to fix something that is absolutely not broken. In a Toronto Sun article today, Antonella Artuso writes, "Thousands of Ontarians have signed petitions and sent online submissions urging Premier Dalton McGuinty to retain the Lord's Prayer, but he has yet to see the light."

The Lord's Prayer is a very important part of our opening proceedings and, being a very inclusive prayer, its traditions date back to Magna Carta and the British parliamentary system. The PC caucus will fight hard to help the Premier see the light, and we on this side of this House will continue to support retaining the Lord's Prayer in the Ontario Legislature.

1510

400-SERIES HIGHWAYS

Mr. Jeff Leal: Every day, over 420,000 people travel Ontario's 400-series highways, making them the busiest highways in the world. With so many cars, it can sometimes be difficult for the Ontario Provincial Police

to catch the speeding and reckless drivers and those who drink and drive.

In order to make it easier to catch these offenders, and in turn to keep their families safe on the road, the OPP is going to be using a new plane to enforce traffic laws. From the plane, the police will be able to see hundreds of vehicles simultaneously. There are now lines painted every 500 meters on major highways to allow officers in the air to measure a vehicle's speed. If they see someone speeding or driving erratically, they can direct their cruisers on the ground to stop the vehicle. By watching the vehicles from above, you can catch drivers who slow down when the police car is nearby.

This initiative is just one more way this government is making our roads safer. Since 2004, this government has brought in many tough measures regarding impaired driving and street racing, including some of the strictest penalties and the highest fines in North America. We know that Ontarians want their roads to be as safe as possible for their families, and we will continue to work with the OPP and community partners to make that happen.

INTERNATIONAL SINGING CONTEST

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Last month, I and 400 guests had the great pleasure to attend the international amateur singing contest put on by John Santos. It was a truly Canadian multicultural event.

What I saw and experienced touched me deeply. The evening's program was designed to showcase the real talent of each performer. Mr. Santos, an accomplished music director, and his wife, Lisa, set the stage for a most supportive backdrop. John's music lifted the spirit of the performers to such heights, which enabled all of them to soar, to give their best and to give of themselves.

The audience too was thus transformed into a supportive and appreciative cast. The rhythmic music—sometimes soft, sometimes powerful, sometimes light—the colourful light and the uplifting, warm, melodious voices produced such a marvellous sound that time was forgotten and people didn't even want to go home. Some shouted, "More, more." It was truly a night to remember.

These finest are Canada's pride and joy. They deserve to be recognized for their enormous talent, and I would be delighted to provide some opportunity so that they could launch their career and bring joy to lives, even to a wider audience here in Ontario.

I'm happy to introduce them to you and the people of Ontario: first-place winner, Andre Carneiro; second-place junior, Kayla de Brito; finalist junior: Emily Ferreira, Nancy Marques and Sandra Nogueira; first-place adult, Veronica Grewal; second place, Sandra da Silva; and finally, the finalists: Rita Francis, Clara Santos and Nevia da Silva. Congratulations to all of them.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise today to remind the House just how far this government has come in terms of long-term care. But before I do that, I'd like to remind my Conservative colleagues of their legacy in long-term care, even though I'm sure they'd sooner forget it. The Conservatives slashed home care, they cut standards in long-term-care homes, and then didn't even bother to inspect them. Under the Conservatives, seniors in long-term-care homes weren't even guaranteed one bath per week. Their model of long-term care is simply one this government does not wish to emulate.

Since 2003, the McGuinty government has invested over $1 billion in long-term-care facilities, including funding for 6,100 more staff, and 2,300 nurses included in that number. We've passed new legislation that restores the standards in these homes. We've improved home care so that 80,000 more Ontarians are now able to stay at home.

Just like a piece of fabric, it's easy to make cuts, take large pieces out and leave huge holes behind. It's much more challenging to sew that fabric up again and try to make it even better than it was before.

Our government's done a lot; we know there's more to do. Along with our partners in the health care system, we're going to continue to make improvements to help Ontarians in our long-term-care facilities.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BLIND PERSONS' RIGHTS AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES DROITS DES AVEUGLES

Mr. Martiniuk moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act to amend the Blind Persons' Rights Act / Projet de loi 70, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les droits des aveugles.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I reintroduce my bill, an amendment to the Blind Persons' Rights Act, for the third time. This bill was first introduced in 2004 and received unanimous second reading the following year.

Currently, the Blind Persons' Rights Act only permits individuals with impaired vision to bring guide dogs to public places. My bill would allow people who are physically disabled, hearing impaired and autistic the right to access places with their guide dog.

I ask all the members of the Legislature to support this bill and allow all physically disabled persons with guide dogs access to public places in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member.

I'd just remind the members of a message that I delivered. When you are introducing a private member's bill, what you are to read to this chamber is the explanatory note. All other items are part of the debate. So I'd just remind all members that on the introduction of private members' bills, it is the explanatory note.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI

Mr. Hampton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 71, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 71, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1517 to 1522.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time to be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John
Bisson, Gilles	Jones, Sylvia	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Elliott, Christine	Kormos, Peter	Sterling, Norman W.
Gélinas, France	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tabuns, Peter
Hampton, Howard	Miller, Paul	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed will please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 17; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The leader of the third party for a short introduction.

Mr. Howard Hampton: This bill makes several amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000. Subsection 58(1) of the act requires an employer who terminates the employment of 50 or more employees in the same four-week period to give notice of termination for the prescribed period. Notice periods are prescribed in Ontario regulation 288/01, which requires eight weeks' notice if up to 199 employees are being terminated, 12 weeks' notice for 200 to 499 employees, and 16 weeks for 500 or more employees.

This bill provides for increased notice periods: 16, 20 and 24 weeks respectively, building them into the act itself, and adds the requirement of a mass layoff agreement between labour and management dealing with such matters as retraining and restructuring options. If no mass layoff agreement is reached, a uniform 52-week notice period applies instead of the 16-, 20- and 24-week periods.

Section 64 of the act provides that an employee is entitled to severance pay if he or she has worked for the employer for at least five years and the employer has a payroll of at least $2.5 million. The bill reduces the qualifying period of employment to one year and the payroll level to $1 million.

Under section 65 of the act, severance pay is calculated as one week's pay for each year of employment. The bill increases this to two weeks pay for each year of employment.

Subsection 65(5) of the act, which caps severance pay at 26 weeks maximum, is repealed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I appreciate the comments, but as I just ruled about reading from the explanatory note, the member read from the explanatory note.

MUNICIPAL RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLER ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES EXTINCTEURS AUTOMATIQUES RÉSIDENTIELS DANS LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Mrs. Jeffrey moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992, the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 with respect to fire sprinkler systems in new residential buildings / Projet de loi 72, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment, la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités à l'égard des extincteurs automatiques dans les nouveaux immeubles d'habitation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: The bill amends the Building Code Act, 1992, the City of Toronto Act, 2006, and the Municipal Act, 2001, to authorize municipalities to pass bylaws requiring the installation of fire sprinkler systems in new residential buildings. The chief building official shall refuse to issue a building permit if a proposed building does not comply with such a bylaw. The bylaws, which may be passed with respect to residential buildings for which building permit applications are made on or after September 1, 2009, prevail over any act or regulation. Sprinkler systems that are required to be installed by the bylaws must comply with standards specified in the building code.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (CELLULAR PHONES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (TÉLÉPHONES CELLULAIRES)

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 73, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other equipment while a person is driving on certain parts of a highway / Projet de loi 73, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour interdire l'utilisation de téléphones et d'autres équipements pendant qu'une personne conduit sur certaines sections d'une voie publique.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a statement.

Mr. John O'Toole: As many have said, I've introduced this bill on a number of occasions. This is a slight variation. I'll read the explanatory notes, as per your instructions.

The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of cell phones, car phones, pagers, personal assistant devices, portable computers, fax machines and other equipment while a person is driving a motor vehicle in an area proscribed by regulation, including community safety zones within 200 metres of the scene of a motor vehicle accident or apparent motor vehicle accident, or within 100 metres of a school crossing zone. There are exceptions for cases like emergencies, cases of a driver who is not an active driver as defined in regulation, and use of equipment entirely through hands-free features.

1530

The registrar is required to report cases where the use of cell phones, car phones, pagers, data assistants, portable devices, portable computers and other equipment proscribed by regulation made under the act have contributed to the cause of a motor vehicle accident.

Driver's licensing examinations are required to include a portion of testing about the applicant's knowledge of the amendments made by this bill.

I know the Minister of Transportation is making our roads safer and will move ahead with portions of this bill.

JAY LAWRENCE AND BART MACKEY MEMORIAL ACT (HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT), 2008

LOI DE 2008 COMMÉMORANT JAY LAWRENCE ET BART MACKEY (MODIFICATION DU CODE DE LA ROUTE)

Mr. Rinaldi moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act in memory of Jay Lawrence and Bart Mackey to amend the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 74, Loi modifiant le Code de la route à la mémoire de Jay Lawrence et Bart Mackey.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Basically, the bill prevents people from riding in the backs of pickup trucks on public highways. Most of the jurisdictions in North America have such legislation. Ontario will now be one.

CONSUMER REPORTING AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RENSEIGNEMENTS CONCERNANT LE CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Ruprecht moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act / Projet de loi 75, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I trust that the member will deliver a short statement.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Thousands of Ontarians are affected by identity theft. This bill provides that where a consumer reporting agency and any other person, such as a bank, to whom a consumer report has been provided discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information or that such information has been stolen or lost, they shall immediately inform the affected consumer.

The bill also provides that a consumer report shall not provide information pertaining to a consumer's address, date of birth, social insurance number, and credit account number that is not in a truncated form, and also that there be no information in the consumer report other than information provided by the information provider, except for a unique identifier number.

This bill provides that consumer reporting agencies shall investigate the disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or delete any information found to be unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate.

This bill also provides that consumer reporting agencies and other persons may not consider, as a key factor in determining the credit score of the consumer, the fact that a consumer report has been requested. In addition, credit scores and the key factors used to determine them are added to the list of information to be disclosed to a consumer upon request.

Finally, this bill provides that a person who takes adverse action against a consumer on the basis of information contained in a consumer report shall inform the consumer of the action and provide a copy of the report,

including the name and address of the agency that prepared it, and shall notify the consumer of their right to correct incomplete or inaccurate information.

I hope that all members will support this bill because this is a great bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On the issue of introduction of bills, I will inform the House that the Speaker will be reviewing his own ruling.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wanted you to know that in terms of reading this report, I had one whole page more to read, but I said no, that was enough—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I appreciate the point of order. As I said, the Speaker will be reviewing his ruling.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. David Caplan: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 97(b), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Mr. Qaadri, Mrs. Sandals and Mr. Orazietti exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Qaadri assumes ballot item 21, Mrs. Sandals assumes ballot item 22, and Mr. Orazietti assumes ballot item 24, and that, notwithstanding standing order 97(g), the requirement for notice be waived with respect to ballot item 27.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Agreed to.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for a member of each party to speak for up to five minutes regarding Sexual Assault Prevention Month, following which a member of each party speak for up to five minutes regarding a tribute to Donald C. MacDonald.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I rise in the House today to mark May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month in Ontario. Sexual assault is a crime that can affect any woman regardless of age, race or religion. More than one third of Canadian women report having had at least one experience of sexual assault since the age of 16.

The majority of these crimes are committed by someone known to the victim. In 86% of cases reported to the police, the victim knew the accused. They were peers, acquaintances, co-workers or family members. Because of this, many victims are reluctant to report the crimes to authorities. In fact, less than 10% of sexual assaults are reported to police.

These statistics are staggering. We need to talk about the issue of sexual violence against women and girls. Sexual Assault Prevention Month is a time to raise public awareness of this serious issue and renew our commitment to ending it.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the crucial function of sexual assault/rape crisis centres and sexual assault/domestic violence treatment centres in our communities across the province. I applaud all of the dedicated individuals who work tirelessly to assist sexual assault victims and to prevent violence against women and girls.

Our government is committed to preventing not just sexual assault but all types of violence against women. We continue to spend more than $190 million annually on violence-against-women services across ministries.

The McGuinty government has taken steps to support women in many ways. We increased funding to sexual assault centres to meet increasing operational costs. We now invest $13 million in 39 sexual assault centres across the province. We've committed $5 million to a comprehensive strategy to fight Internet sexual abuse and exploitation, including pornography and luring. Amendments have been made to the Liquor Licence Act to address the dangers of date rape drugs.

Eradicating sexual violence requires the changing of attitudes and behaviours on both individual and societal levels. Instilling positive values in our children by teaching them the importance of healthy, equal relations is critical to ending sexual violence. If we encourage gender equality in our children by teaching boys to respect girls and by teaching girls to respect themselves, we will make great progress in eradicating the power imbalance that is at the root of sexual violence.

1540

I would like to take this opportunity to refer everyone to a resource at the Ontario Women's Directorate website. It helps us to talk about sexual violence. The website has information on Sexual Assault Prevention Month, the warning signs of sexual violence, advice on prevention and links to people who can help. It can be found at www.citizenship.gov.on.ca.

This is the 20th year that Ontario has officially observed May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month, and I am proud to say that the Ontario government will be showing its commitment to ending sexual violence by working closely with our community partners to develop a coordinated plan to target sexual violence. Governments, agencies and communities need to continue to work together to help women feel secure in their communities and in their homes. Together we will continue to build a better Ontario for families and for all women.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to recognize May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month in the province of Ontario. I'm sure that we can all agree that

sexual assault is a horrific crime that not only causes physical harm, but extreme emotional and psychological damage as well. The effects of sexual assault can destroy one's sense of dignity, worth and self-esteem.

This year marks the 20th year that Ontario has officially recognized May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month, and unfortunately this issue remains extremely stigmatized in our society. Because of this stigma, feelings of shame and humiliation or fear of revictimization through the criminal trial process, sexual assault is one of the least reported crimes against both men and women.

Statistics shows that one of every 10 sexual assaults is reported to police. Further to this information, it is estimated that only one in 100 sexual assaults committed by an acquaintance is reported. We must, as a province, make it a priority to create supportive atmospheres in our communities so that these nine in 10 and 99 in 100 remaining victims feel comfortable and anticipate community support when coming forth with reporting this abuse.

This month gives us the opportunity to come together to raise awareness of a topic that is reported to afflict one in four women and one in five men. With this month being Sexual Assault Prevention Month, we must equip the public with awareness of supports that exist for victims who do report assaults to the police. We must come together, both as legislators and as members of our communities, to raise awareness and to take action on this issue.

Sexual assault is a crime that does not discriminate based on race, culture, creed, sex or age. It's estimated that 25% of women and 20% of men will be made victims of sexual assault in their lifetimes. Statistics Canada stated in 2005 that 61% of sexual assaults reported were committed against youth under 17, and that 83% of disabled women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Certainly these numbers depict a frightening story, and I think we can all agree that we can do better and must do better.

It's at this time that I would like to acknowledge the tireless work of centres and agencies in my community that do so much in supporting our members who have had the unfortunate experience of dealing with sexual assault: the Oshawa Durham Rape Crisis Centre, the Durham Region Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Care Centre of the Lakeridge Health Corp., and the Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Service of Durham Region.

I would also like to commend all of our shelters that house, care for and comfort victims of sexual assault who have nowhere to turn after these traumatizing experiences, including the Denise House, Y's WISH, Bethesda House, the Muslim Welfare Home, and Herizon House.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Distress Centre Durham and Durham Mental Health Services' crisis services. These crisis lines in Durham region field the calls of those who have been sexually assaulted and offer telephone support and referrals to the aforementioned organizations.

I commend the many groups that work tirelessly to spread awareness and remove the stigma associated with sexual assault. I wish them the best as they move forward with their campaigns this month.

In closing, I'd like to express our thanks to those people who are working every day to help people overcome their experiences with the violent crime of sexual assault. I urge all members of this Legislature to work toward raising awareness this month and every month so that all victims will feel confident in reporting these terrible crimes and will know that their community stands behind them.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my dubious honour to rise and speak for those who have been silenced. Mr. Speaker, you know that 25 women a year are killed, mostly by their domestic partners, and that is consistent from year to year from 1974 right to the present—nothing changes about that.

Make no mistake about it: This is a war against women. One in two women will be sexually assaulted at some point in her life. So I speak for those who haven't heard yet, those daughters and granddaughters of ours who will be the next victims of sexual assault unless we do something in this House. The silence speaks volumes.

The other night, we heard from Stephen Lewis, a former leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party, about sexual warfare against women in the Congo. But this is sexual warfare too, and it happens right here. It happens at home, and anyone who does not assist women in freeing themselves and their children from a site of sexual warfare is complicit.

You might ask, "How do we do that?"

First of all, we encourage women to free themselves and get transitional housing. Unfortunately, there isn't transitional housing for women who would free themselves from domestic assault. It doesn't exist, and what does is overcrowded, always full or sometimes just not available, depending on where you live.

What else do we do? Most women stay in conditions of abuse because they can't afford to leave. They would be on welfare with their children if they were to try to escape. What we need to do is help women to sustain themselves economically. We don't do that. In this, the government is complicit.

How don't we do that? Number one, we don't have child care in this province. In Quebec, you can get child care for $7 a day. We don't have a child care program here. That aids and abets violence against women.

We don't have a minimum wage that you can live on—remember, most of the minimum wage earners in this province are women. The minimum wage with this government is below the poverty line. That aids and abets violence against women.

We claw back the national child supplement. That aids and abets violence against women.

Poverty itself is a women's issue, and we're not dealing with it in this House.

One hundred and seventy thousand households wait for affordable housing, and most of those households are

headed by women and have children in them. We're not building affordable housing. That demeans women and aids and abets and contributes to violence.

The vast majority of assaults against women are by those they know or are related to, but we do not educate children, and we could. The Miss G Project calls for women's studies in schools. They've called for this for years, and yet the Ministry of Education does nothing to move that file ahead. That aids and abets violence against women.

We in the New Democratic Party have tried to put forward card-check certification, facilitating unionization for those women who are not unionized. That helps women gain economic independence. Not passing that bill aids and abets violence against women.

To do any less than work with everything in our capacity to end this war against women—this quiet, unacknowledged but ugly war against women in our midst—is to really aid and abet violence against women.

The time for empty rhetoric is over. It's been over for a generation now. It's been over since 1974 and before that. It's been over since our grandmothers' era. Empty rhetoric is just that: empty rhetoric.

The time for action is now. We've outlined how to act; we've outlined how to address the issues that would free women from assault and free women from domestic violence. But we don't do it. In fact, this is the government that jailed Noellee Mowatt—jailed a victim of domestic violence.

Again, I speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, I speak for those who haven't heard yet and I speak for those who would rather forget. They in the McGuinty Liberal government would rather forget, and they clearly haven't heard yet.

DONALD MACDONALD

Mr. Howard Hampton: Donald Cameron MacDonald is one of the great figures of 20th-century Ontario politics. Sadly, he passed away two months ago in early March, at the age of 94.

Donald was the MPP for the riding of York South for almost three decades, from 1955 to 1982, and leader of the CCF and the NDP from 1953 to 1970. He leaves behind a political legacy for which all Ontarians should be thankful.

1550

Donald MacDonald almost single-handedly transformed the ethical standards of Ontario politics. After he was first elected, he was relentless in uncovering corruption and scandal in the governments of the 1950s and early 1960s. He forced governments to clean up their acts, and he created a whole new public expectation of ethical political behaviour.

He took the role of opposition leader very seriously. A Conservative government under Premier Leslie Frost had been used to having things their own comfortable way. And so, when Donald MacDonald began his tireless efforts, they were shaken at his intense and penetrating scrutiny, which unearthed corruption and scandal and forced ministers of the government to resign. The public's eyes were opened to the good-old-boy style in which Ontario public affairs had been conducted. Public opinion left Premier Frost and his successor, John Robarts, no choice but to bring in higher standards of government practice, higher standards that I would suggest every member of this Legislature has benefited from today, and certainly the public of Ontario has benefited from for many, many years.

Donald moved the issues that were important to ordinary people from the margin to the centre of the Ontario political agenda. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of public affairs and an incredible memory for the names of people and where they worked, what they did and their own personal history. He used his incredible memory and his encyclopedic knowledge of issues to dominate debates and shape legislation as no other opposition leader ever had before.

Donald had grown up on a farm and his first occupation was as a teacher, so agriculture and education were policy fields that he naturally had an understanding of. But as well, he became an expert on hydroelectricity and energy, natural resources and the economy of northern Ontario, and on health. He insisted that public policy reflect the interests of common, ordinary people and that the concerns of farmers and workers be taken seriously. He was respected by opponents and the media for his knowledge, his integrity and his determination, as well as for his legendary stamina.

Donald MacDonald was absolutely tireless. There almost never was a free weekend. For years he handled his own publicity, turned out his own press releases, did his own research, drove his own car—sometimes alone, sometimes with reporters in tow—up and down the province's roads and highways. He organized meetings, sought out candidates, planned strategy, sold memberships in the CCF and the NDP. Physically very strong and full of energy, he was a leader that others complained they couldn't keep up with.

Donald, by any measure, was an incredible individual. He has left all of Ontario with a legacy. He came to what was then the CCF in 1946 and served as education and publicity director in Ottawa. This was after service in the navy during the Second World War. Later, he was national treasurer and organizer for the CCF, and in 1953 he won the leadership of the Ontario CCF. For the next two years, he led the CCF from outside the Legislature.

In the 1955 election, he was elected MPP for York South, a seat he held for the next 27 years. I remember that I sat with him last winter in the by-election in York South–Weston. Paul Ferreira, as we know, won that by-election, and it was a very close by-election. I remember that he called Paul over to him as the results were coming in and said, "Paul, I held this riding for 27 years. Never did I have such a result that was this close."

With a caucus of only three members to start with, Donald MacDonald became the CCF critic for 18 different government departments. He handled them all, and

people who knew of his work understood that he could handle it all. He led the transformation of the provincial CCF into the New Democratic Party. His leadership succeeded in putting the New Democratic Party on a solid, permanent foundation. In the 1967 election, the NDP jumped from eight to 20 seats and from 16% to 26% of the provincial vote. From that base, which had taken him 12 years to build, the party rose to the official opposition and eventually to government.

I knew Donald personally. My grandfather owned a community general store in a rural area. When I was eight or nine years old, I used to go to the store and pump gas; it was part of my job for my grandfather. I remember Donald MacDonald coming into my grampa's store and asking my grampa if he could make a financial contribution to what was then the CCF and about to become the NDP. My grandfather was a very big man as well. Of course, I was quite small, and I remember looking up at these two very big men, both very powerful, very tall. My grandfather was, besides the storekeeper, the reeve of the rural municipality, and the post office was in the store. So he was very well-known. I remember sitting and listening to them talk about politics and about what needed to be done.

One of the most amazing things about Donald is, even just before he died he would say to me, "There's that steelworker in Atikokan; there's that railroader in Rainy River; there's that railroader in Kenora; there's that wonderful teacher in Fort Frances who has done so much in terms of special education. What's her name again?" He just had an incredible memory for people that I think most of us in politics would have been very envious of.

After the 1967 election, many people thought, "Gee, here's a guy who's led the party to this new frontier; he should be set." But unfortunately, there were some within the New Democratic Party who thought that the NDP needed new leadership. So, after 15 years as leader of the CCF and NDP, Donald stepped down to make room for a new generation, and Stephen Lewis became leader of the NDP.

When Donald retired from the Legislature in 1982, he certainly didn't retire from public life. He became one of the first chairs of the Ontario Election Finances Commission. For many years, he was president of York Community Services, the province's first community health centre, which he had been a prime mover in establishing, and later was president of the Learning Enrichment Foundation. He taught political science at York and Ryerson universities, edited a textbook on Ontario politics and wrote his memoirs: The Happy Warrior. He was awarded the Order of Canada and the Order of Ontario.

One thing that I know Donald would want me to say is that he could not have done anything without his wife, Simone. They had three children, who, through most of their period of growing up, recognized that their father was on the road, that their father was doing some very important work, which meant that Simone was primarily responsible for paying the bills in the house, keeping everything pointed in the right direction and, most of all, looking after Sandi, Joy and Brian. Simone is a truly remarkable woman. She herself is 94 years old and continues to live, with her family's support, in the Toronto home that she and Donald shared for 45 years.

Donald MacDonald's career is a testament to principle, to conviction and to hard work. As I said earlier, he leaves a legacy that has benefited every one of us in this Legislature and a legacy that has benefited anyone who is lucky enough to live in Ontario. Donald MacDonald is someone who I believe we can all be quite proud of and someone that we all owe a debt to.

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Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you for the opportunity this afternoon to pay tribute to Donald MacDonald, a wonderful parliamentarian that I had the privilege to serve with in this Legislature. Norm Sterling and I—upon this occasion we're allowed to use names—served with him from 1977 to 1982. Bob Runciman, the leader of the official opposition at the present time, served with him for a period of time, along with Tony Ruprecht. I think that's the four of us in the Legislature who would have served with him at a particular point in time.

I must say, coming into the Legislature at that time, there were people I would call icons. I'll concentrate on the New Democratic Party today, because Donald MacDonald was the leader of the New Democratic Party. I see Michael Cassidy, one of the former leaders of the New Democratic Party and a member for Ottawa, is in the Legislature with us today, no doubt to pay tribute to Donald a little later on at Hart House, where there will be an official gathering to remember him and pay tribute to him.

But it was a different era at that time in the Legislature. Things were always better in years gone by to those who have been around for a while; perhaps those who have a different perspective may not agree. But there were members of the Legislature who, when they got up to speak in the Legislature, you left your office to hear them speak. One of the reasons was that there were no television sets to watch then, so you had what was called a squawk box, which was a box which gave you the speech itself but not the visual to go with it.

So when you knew a certain person was going to speak, you would come to the Legislature at that time to hear them. Among those, I think of people such as Andrew Brewin; Fred Young was certainly another individual; Stephen Lewis, quite obviously, was one; and Jim Renwick. These were people who, when they delivered a speech, people actually listened. There was real substance to the speeches. They were articulate, eloquent and compelling in the arguments that they made, even if one didn't agree with the arguments that were being shared with members of the House, because it was essentially only members of the House at that time. There was no television and no direct radio of what was happening.

We were fortunate to have Donald MacDonald in the House. I looked at the Globe and Mail obituary, and—I

wouldn't call it the lead; I guess I would call it the title—it reads as follows: "Ontario NDP leader turned province into a three-party political system; a politician who was remarkably deficient in ego, he took over with a caucus so small that he held 18 portfolios, yet 'was never, ever, set back.' He put cause before ambition and twice stepped aside for others," which of course is difficult to do in the political realm when we have seats within the Legislature and a person would like to enter the Legislature as a new leader, and even to step down as a leader. I think there's a recognition that one has made some significant progress, and in 1967, when the NDP went from two seats to 20 seats, that would have been seen as significant progress. When it came time to move aside, he was prepared to move aside as the leader and allow Stephen Lewis to take over at that time, who was, again, an articulate and compelling speaker and a distinguished parliamentarian in this House.

So there was that lack of ego, I think, and there was reason for ego, by the way, because he was a very bright individual, a compelling speaker, as I've mentioned, and one who did a lot of spadework in order to prepare himself for the House and for the various public speeches that he made. Yet he was prepared, on an occasion, to step down as leader, and then step down in 1982 so that the new leader of the New Democratic Party at that time, Bob Rae, whom he had recruited from the federal House to come to the province, became the leader of the New Democratic Party. Again, he actually gave up his seat of some 26 years to allow Mr. Rae to assume that position.

I remember as well, when he was with the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in 1953, when he became leader in 1953. In the 1950s, the days of McCarthyism in the US, there were many who, if they were on the left at all, were presumed to be closet Communists of some kind. It took a little extra gumption and courage to be a member of a party which was seen in that light by some in the media and elsewhere, so he deserves credit for that.

There were two individuals who were writing at that time—and it makes it easier, in terms of your research, when you can refer to the dean of the Legislature in terms of the press gallery: Eric Dowd. I thought that his lead, when he was writing his column on Donald MacDonald, was most appropriate. He said, "The most underrated politician in Ontario in 50 years has died—still without being given the recognition he deserves."

He goes on to talk about his contribution and says that he "was much more. MacDonald took over when the party had only two of 90 seats in the Legislature and gave it a voice that was missing and for a time led an opposition party that pound for pound was the most effective in memory."

He goes on to say, "MacDonald served as an MPP without bitterness under Lewis and his successor as leader, Michael Cassidy, until 1982, when he showed rare unselfishness." That's where he makes reference to relinquishing his seat so that Bob Rae could run for that seat.

Jim Coyle, who was back with us in the Legislature today covering for the Toronto Star, was knowledgeable of that era and wrote something rather significant when he said:

"His death snips another of the dwindling ties to an era when Ontario politics was played at a very different pace, to a notably different code.

"MacDonald's prime was passed in a world of oratory, not sound bites; legwork rather than image; the Legislature a pre-TV gentlemen's club in which lapses in sobriety, not uncommon of an evening sitting, might be observed but never noted."

He goes on to mention, "Still, his frequent allegations of scandal occasionally did get under the skin of then-Premier Leslie Frost"—even though he was liked by Leslie Frost. We will all like this reference, particularly those of you from rural areas: He once accused him, using rural imagery, the currency of the day in the Legislature, of "'chittering like a pig' ....

"To the Young Turks on the left," Mr. Coyle notes, "he was a bit right-wing, old hat and had" perhaps "'a loser's image.'"

But to those who had served with him in the Legislature, to those who remembered what a pioneer he was for the CCF in Ontario and the New Democratic Party—because he was part of the group that brought the New Democratic Party out of the CCF and essentially made it quite popular within the urban setting.

Des Morton said of him that he had the "ability to discover triumph in adversity." So, even when the NDP went down in seats, there always seemed to be a moral victory. It reminds me of certain sources of news who always see the NDP as having a moral victory even when they don't win. But Donald MacDonald did see that. He was the happy warrior. He would come down to the legislative dining room and sit at any table, because he was the head of the election finances commission—and recommended and saw implemented some really good changes that helped Ontario politics, as the present leader of the New Democratic Party has mentioned, to elevate the degree of ethics within the realm of politics in Ontario.

He'll be remembered fondly. He will be remembered as a friend to many. He'll be remembered as one who could have taken a different path in life and been entirely successful. He could have made a lot more money and perhaps had a lot more prestige if he had chosen a different vocation. He chose politics, and Ontario is the better for it.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm pleased, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, to offer a few comments in recognition of the passing and the remarkable life of Donald C. MacDonald.

As the Minister of Transportation indicated, I'm one of only four members currently serving in this place who had the opportunity to serve with Mr. MacDonald, although it was a rather brief opportunity to get to know him—about one year, really—before he gave up his seat for Mr. Rae. But I obviously did have the opportunity to meet with him and talk to him. As a follower of pro-

vincial politics, I had known of him for some years before getting elected.

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He certainly was a force to be reckoned with and someone who had great respect across the lines of all three parties in this province. As you've heard from previous speakers, he was personally a noble figure, as Mr. Hampton suggested, a tall man, a distinguished looking gentleman, very genial, very approachable, very friendly and very warm—genuinely warm, I think, even with folks who were sitting on the other side of the aisle.

This place, as the Minister of Transportation indicated, was quite a bit different in those days. Why it has become what it has over the years, you can attribute to all sorts of things. We didn't have television in those days, and I think that perhaps has been a factor. But even if we had had television broadcasts of the proceedings back then, I don't think it would have changed the approach of Donald C. MacDonald.

During my brief opportunity to observe him, sitting as a government backbencher at the time, he approached issues, questions and debates in this place in a very deliberate, calm and reasoned way, and never got into the kinds of things that I suspect most of us have been guilty of in this place over the past 10 or 15 years. Giving up his seat to Mr. Rae, after almost 27 years of service, I can relate to to some degree. I have just served a little over 27 years, and some folks have been suggesting that I might give up my seat as well. But I want to assure you that that's not about to happen.

If you look at Mr. MacDonald's history of service, not only to this place but to his country in World War II as a member of the Royal Canadian Navy—he had a significant career outside of politics as well, as a teacher and a journalist, before he became actively involved in politics. We've heard about all the significant impacts he had on this place, on the transformation of the CCF into the NDP, and his approach. I was reading a comment about his election, after two years without a seat. He very quickly became known as one of the most vocal members of the Legislature. He fought for issues such as prison reform and universal public health care, and emphasized pragmatism over doctrinaire socialism as he tried to appeal to voters as a moderate reformer. I was very impressed with his approach to issues that I know the NDP cares about deeply today, as many of us do.

A long and distinguished career, and a great contribution to his party, his province and his country.

On behalf of the official opposition, I want to extend our sincere condolences to his wife and family members.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask members and our guests to please rise as we observe a moment of silence in remembrance of the former member.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable members for participating in this tribute. I will see that copies of the Hansard are transmitted to the family on behalf of all of us.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to welcome to the Legislature today Mr. Michael Cassidy, who served in the 29th, 30th, 31st and 32nd Parliaments for the riding of Ottawa Centre.

Welcome to Queen's Park today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 6, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 44, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 44, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to talk about Bill 44, the Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act, 2008. As members of this Legislature will know, and I hope some of those who may be watching on TV will find out, this is an omnibus bill and it comes by once every year. It is an accompanying bill with the budget. This omnibus bill, though—

Hon. David Caplan: It's ominous.

Mr. Michael Prue: Ominous. Yes, some would say it's an ominous bill.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Perhaps, if the honourable minister would listen long enough, he may understand why certain aspects of this bill are also quite ominous in their nature.

The bill itself touches on 20 pieces of legislation, and it is a replacement of Bill 24, which was the bill that followed the fall economic statement.

Before I delve into what is contained in this bill, it is important to talk about what was contained in the budget, because the two are companion pieces and you cannot understand one without understanding the other. Before I go into the various measures that are undertaken in Bill 44, I want to touch briefly on the budget bill and why some of the measures may have found necessity in this particular bill.

First of all, the budget itself: We have had time now over the last few weeks to stop and reflect and to think about the budget that was passed. When budget day comes, it is the usual sort of stampede of Liberal members and the finance minister standing up there and talking about the wonders of what is contained within the bill, and trying to tell us all the appropriate measures that have been taken on a whole broad range of issues, and how they're going to affect the economy, and how only

their government could come up with such a scheme, and how the people are going to be so happy. Invariably, the next day in the newspapers and on television that night and on the radios, you will hear little snippets of the budget, and almost everything that is contained within that budget will be what the finance minister said, or the highlights, and what he or she has been trying to prove.

That happened in this budget, as it happens in every other budget, but the reality is that in the couple of days to a week that follow, it's time for the opposition to start looking at the fine print. It's time for us to start looking at what is contained in the budget that did not meet the highlights, that was not part of the half-hour or so speech of the finance minister on that particular day, that was not part of the scrum that took place outside, and to start looking at what in fact was contained within the budget and to make some thoughtful and careful analysis of whether or not the budget is meeting its much-ballyhooed trumpetings.

I have had an opportunity over these months to look at what the finance minister was trying to say, what he has planned for Ontario, and to take a good, hard look at whether we are going in the direction that Ontarians might reasonably expect us to go.

There are things in the budget, I'm sure—people are going to stand up and say, "This is a great item," and people are going to say, in terms of the elderly, to stay in their homes, that there is a little bit of money in the budget that may assist them at some future time, or that the schools got a little bit of extra money, or that there was a bit more money for the hospitals, or that there was money put here or there. But overall the budget, to me, even until this day, is quite a disappointment.

The government was able to find some $5 billion of revenue and spent about the same $5 billion in additional programs. But within the body of that $5 billion there was very little of an imaginative note. There was very little that was done that would change Ontario in a way that I think people were hungry for change.

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We've just gone through an election last October. I know that all parties, including my own, had a list of plans and things they wanted to do, great changes they were going to do in the province during a four-year period. Some of those plans were to have been implemented right away; some of them were going to have to wait. But in this very timid budget there was very little that was new, very little that was novel, very little that is going to change the way of life of the people of Ontario.

I looked down through the list of what people were expecting in terms of change. The first was a promise that cities were going to be helped oh so much more than in the past. Cities, I recognize, get two cents of the gas tax—that was courtesy of the last Parliament—but cities were asking for much more than that. Cities were asking for an aggressive program to upload the download, and there have been, and continue to be, only the most modest efforts contained within this budget or by this government at all.

Cities have been asking for additional funding and additional powers to undertake necessary structural changes. The cities in Ontario are underfunded by billions upon billions of dollars in terms of keeping up the infrastructure, everything from roads and sewers to schools and community centres to libraries and police forces. They were looking for some considerable amounts of money, and those moneys were not contained within the budget.

Right around budget day the finance minister, sensing that perhaps he had underplayed the city aspect, came up with another bill, Bill 35, and to much ballyhoo he walked into this House and into the press room downstairs and brought with him the venerable Hazel McCallion, my friend the mayor of Mississauga; the finance chair from the city of Toronto, Shelley Carroll; and Doug Reycraft from AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, who all had wonderful things to say about Bill 35 and how the government was going to spend money.

Some might have been forgiven by looking at a budget bill that had very little money for cities because here was a plan to put it in a different perspective. We were going to do this by way of Bill 35, and the cities were going to do all right because they were supposed to share any surplus above $600 million that was available this year and, if I remember what the finance minister had to say that day, each and every year into the foreseeable future.

We had an opportunity to address that. I remember addressing the media and I remember coming into this House and talking about how the cities were not going to get what was being promised. They needed long-term sustainable funding, which a budget could have done; they weren't getting that. They needed the upload of the downloaded programs, which was not contained within the body of this budget, and a firm commitment from the government that merely putting them at the end of a process to see if there were any additional revenues at the end of the year would never match.

You can imagine my surprise and chagrin, after having heard the minister talk about those things in the budget and what was contained therein and in Bill 35, when we actually saw a copy of Bill 35 a few days later. The bill nowhere contains the word "municipality." The bill nowhere contains the word "infrastructure." The bill nowhere gives an opportunity for municipalities to accept additional funds, save and except through regulation and only in the first year.

You have to understand that the municipalities are now completely deflated. They know that although there may be a small amount of monies this year, as the economy continues to worsen they also know that it's unlikely the monies will flow to them in future or subsequent years.

The bill, which is still before debate in this Legislature and is just about finished third reading at this point and will be subject to debate maybe later this week or next week, allows the government carte blanche to give the monies to anybody at all they want. So I have to state that

in terms of this budget and in terms of Bill 44, which accompanies it, there is nothing or next to nothing in terms of cities.

We looked at the failure of poverty in the election. To much ballyhoo, the Premier promised that he was going to tackle the problem of poverty. He said that he was going to set up commissions and studies, he was going to look into poverty and he was going to eradicate poverty by at least 25% in the next five years. There were many people out there who believed that this was possible, and more so even believed that this government and this Premier were good for their word and would end up doing it. You can imagine the surprise of many, many of those people in terms of this budget and in terms of Bill 44, that they now read that there is almost nothing contained in terms of poverty.

As we analyzed what was in the budget and the finance minister stood up to boldly announce that there was going to be a 2% increase in the welfare rates in this province, it was only upon subsequent study that we found out that the 2% would not even take effect until late this year and possibly even next year. We were able to discover that this promise that had been made to help the poor, in terms of—the poorest of the poor, those who need to subsist on either Ontario Works or on ODSP, were being shortchanged again.

But there was still more. The Premier and the finance minister and others have stood up in this House and said they're going off to study it. We know what has happened over the course of the last few days: The study may be taking place, but it is a closed study. It is a study that does not allow the poor to have any implementation, to have any say, to attend the meetings at all. It is a study in which MPPs who are not on the government side of the of the House have, to date, been locked out. It is a study that shows virtually no promise.

There is nothing whatsoever in this budget that builds new affordable housing. When we pressed further and asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing how many affordable units have been built in the last four and a half years since the Liberals were elected, he came back with the magnificent total of 468 affordable units that are presently occupied. This is in a province that has hundreds of thousands of people on a waiting list, and Toronto alone has 175,000 families on a waiting list for affordable housing.

There was some money for upkeep for existing structures, $100,000, which the government of course said was absolutely wonderful. It does not meet even the standards that are required in the city of Toronto, which lobbied effectively and earnestly and with a great deal of passion for some $300 million a year over the next 10 years in order to get the housing that exists in the city of Toronto up to code. The small amount of money that has been put in this budget (a) not to build any housing, and (b) not to do the improvements that are necessary, was a huge disappointment.

I looked at the failure too of business and job losses. One has to look at the economy to see that we are in very real trouble in terms of job losses in this province. I listened to the government, and they talk about the hundreds or millions or trillions of jobs that they have created, and they state so with huge abandon. Every day I hear some new enormous figure of jobs that have been created, but they are always very reluctant to talk about the jobs that have been lost. We know what is happening in the province of Ontario in terms of the economic downturn. We know what is happening to ordinary people outside of Toronto and even some inside of Toronto as the manufacturing base declines. We have heard story upon story of losses in our community and the devastating impact that that has in smaller towns.

We know in northern Ontario, when a mine shuts down or a pulp mill shuts down, then usually the town shuts down with it. But even here in southern Ontario, in places like Listowel, when Campbell Soup announces they're closing and 500 jobs are gone, that is devastating to that community. In Smiths Falls, when the Hershey plant announced that they're taking the whole thing back south of the border, that is devastating to the people in that community.

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We know that in the auto sector there have been layoffs in factory after factory that make ancillary parts. We know that even General Motors, Ford and Chrysler have not been immune, and that some 200,000 people are out of work who would not have been or would not have expected to be out of work just four years ago when this government was first elected. There has been a complete failure to deal with that within the budget, a complete failure to have a coherent and consistent policy.

They can throw some money around. I remember the Minister of Innovation standing up here, oh so very proud of having spent some $30 million to bring a pharmaceutical manufacturer here to Canada. I don't begrudge what he did. I'm not saying it was wrong or that I might not have done the same thing, trying to bring a pharmaceutical manufacturer to Canada. But the reality is that some $30 million were spent and we secured 30 jobs.

I put the question on that day when I had to comment. We have lost 200,000 jobs; we have gained 30 jobs. He only now has 199,970 to go until he's even again. That's the reality, and this government didn't deal with it. And when you stand up and you say, "Shouldn't the budget contain some measures that are going to help? Shouldn't there be a manufacturing investment tax credit?", you get hooted and hollered down. When you say, "Shouldn't we have a Buy Ontario policy?", you get hooted and hollered down, even though what we are suggesting is nothing different than what backbench Liberals have been suggesting for a long time. When we talk about part of the reason for the job losses being electricity prices, we get hooted and hollered down as well, for talking about having a manufacturing rate level. So I was very disappointed in all that talk about business.

The government did say—and some might think it's a good idea; I think it's probably a wasted opportunity—that they have cut capital and corporate taxes. I'm sure

that they had many people within the capital and corporate sector thinking that this was a really good idea, and I'm sure they lobbied really hard and were very pleased with how the government reacted in that way, that corporate taxes were going to go down.

I have no objection to corporate taxes going down, provided that when they go down they stimulate the economy. But who are we stimulating when we reduce those taxes? It's not the poor manufacturers, because very few of them would have been eligible for some of the taxes that have been reduced; it is the banks and the insurance companies and the oil companies who are all entitled to this money too.

When I walk out onto the street and I explain this to people, and I say, "Are you proud of the fact that we've just given the big oil companies a tax writedown?" they stare at me in disbelief as they're pumping gas into their cars at $1.23 or $1.25 a litre here in Toronto and $1.35 and $1.40 and $1.45 in northern Ontario. They stare at me in disbelief that this government thinks that that's a good thing. Or the banks: When you put your card into one of the automatic tellers that charges you 25 cents or 50 cents or $1 or $2 for literally every transaction you do, and when corporate bank profits are into the billions of dollars each quarter, they are really surprised that this capital tax goes to them as well.

We believe in the NDP that if you're having job losses in particular sectors, you should target the sectors that need the money and not give it holus-bolus to everyone, particularly those industries that are doing very nicely without it, thank you. But this government failed to take any action on that within the budget as well.

There was also a real failure of this government—I have known the Minister of Education for a long time. We were colleagues fighting the amalgamation of the city of Toronto when that was imposed mercilessly upon the citizens of our municipality all those years ago. I have watched, from this side of the House, her rapid rise through the ranks to become the Minister of Education. But I have to state that this budget was a disappointment because this government promised to fix the funding formula, a funding formula which Liberals said was broken even as it was being first introduced in the province and which they continue to say is broken but do nothing to fix at all.

There was nothing in the budget that will help small schools to survive, rural communities to keep their schools or places like Toronto to keep their school pools. Some people may say, "Oh, Toronto just wants to keep their swimming pools. Why should Toronto get something we don't have?"

The reality is that every community is different, and if we could fix the funding formula there would be the wherewithal across this province to assist our education. The towns would not have to lose schools. The Catholic school board would not be making announcements like they're making today to shut down their kindergarten program, that we could pay a decent wage to people who are transporting their kids around in buses, and that a place like Toronto could keep its pools. None of this was in the budget, and nothing of this is contained within Bill 44, the companion piece.

In the period—and this is what is upsetting to me in terms of this bill and why I'm standing here today. Most economists, and Warren Buffett in particular, will tell you that the North American economy is about to go into decline. The telltale signs are all there. In the last quarter, Ontario was at 0.1% of an increase; 0.1% less, and we would be in recession—and we would—and that would be at least three months of economic decline and we would be in recession. We are skirting very close to that level. Whether we go below or not—I'm not a soothsayer—I cannot tell you, but I'm very worried that we may. This budget did not address what needed to be addressed to keep Ontario whole.

When I opened up the paper today in the financial section—it may surprise some members opposite and some of my Conservative friends to note that this New Democrat reads the business section first in the morning. I read it first to see how our economy is going, whether the stocks are up or down. I do own some stocks, but they're part of an RRSP, and I couldn't tell you for the life of me which ones I own. So I don't go to the detail of the page, but I do like to look to see how the market is reacting. I like to read the pages to see what kinds of takeovers, what kinds of companies are closing down, what kinds of workers may be out of a job, what kinds of government initiatives are creating wealth or not creating wealth, the state of our dollar—because that's a very high factor on some of the closures, and some of the difficulties some manufacturers, although not all manufacturers, might have. As I read that today, there was a very large and good article about the housing market and the decline in Ontario—and in Canada, but particularly in Ontario.

The number of resale homes has declined substantially over last year. Although the cost of the homes is remaining hard and fairly solid, the number of homes that are on the market and the number being sold are reducing very rapidly, and it is now starting to look somewhat like it is happening south of the border. This is one of the first telltale signs of a market in decline and further warns me, and I think others, that something needs to be done.

We have already talked in part about the 200,000 job losses, and they continue. The government sometimes pours good money after bad. I'm thinking here in terms of Dell, which said, "We will train a whole bunch of people," and the government gave over $11 million. After a few months of training those people, they all found themselves out on the street. The only thing that was sure and certain was that Dell kept all those $11-million trained people and then put them out on the street, so the government gained very little in the long-term. There are other examples like that as well.

I am also worried that the government is overly rosy in its forecast of how and where they think this economy is headed during the balance of this year. They are talking about a 1.5% to 2% increase in gross domestic product

and taxation and everything that goes with it. Yet we know, quite frankly, that we're at 0.1% in the last quarter and we only have to look south of the border to see what may happen to us in the months and years ahead. If you go down to the United States—and I've only been down there once in the last few months—to talk to Americans who are subject to the subprime, and you look at the number of houses that are boarded up in border cities, and at people who no longer can afford the homes, where the properties have been escheated to the city or the county; when you look at all of those vacant houses and talk to people about the value of the homes, which at one point were selling for $300,000 and $400,000 and $500,000, which are now selling for only a fraction of that, at the number of people who have been forced to walk away from their residence because their house is now worth less than at the time they purchased it—all of that is happening, and yet this government seems oblivious that we may be on that same roller coaster.

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I look at what happened with Bear Stearns, one of the largest investment banks in the entire world—the fourth-largest one in the United States alone—and how it went, in one day, from being worth hundreds of millions or billions of dollars down to $2 a share. It doesn't take very long for those kinds of things to happen.

I look at the American balance of payments, and I am constantly amazed that that country continues to exist. Our chief trading partner is running a deficit, from the Iraq war alone, of about $5 billion a week. They are trillions of dollars in the hole, they have virtually no way of paying off debts, and the job losses and the market that is going with them are abysmal to watch.

Into all of this, Mr. Speaker, we now have a budget and Bill 44—I'm glad you gave me some latitude and let me get to it; I wanted to draw a picture of where we are and what this bill is going to do. This bill is an interim appropriation act. And if all it was doing was interim appropriation, I would vote for it—that might surprise some members opposite.

Having been a mayor and having been in politics for 20 years, I know that this Legislature, like every political body—just like a city, just like a school board, just like the country—has to pay its bills. An appropriation act simply allows the government to pay its bills as taxes are being collected. If this was an appropriation act, whether I agreed with the budget or not, whether I thought there was going to be money at the end—I would have to trust the economists who advised the government that things are rosier than I believe they are—I would allow an appropriation. There is no way we can allow the government of Ontario, or any government, to grind itself into the dirt with no money.

So here we have the appropriation portion. It's not going to be split off, but if it were, I guarantee you that at least this New Democrat would stand up and vote for it, because I understand the necessity of doing so.

But what else is contained in the bill besides interim appropriation? A whole number of factors, and I want to talk about some that I agree with, just so that members opposite will maybe stand up and take notice for a minute.

I think that what the government has done around the entertainment tax credit is a very good thing. I think it's a very good thing that this government is taking the time, spending the money and recognizing the value of the entertainment industry in this province—particularly in my city of Toronto, but also in Hamilton and elsewhere, where films are starting to be made—taking money and investing in films to be made in this country.

We have a wealth of talent from people who are actors, directors, filmmakers and producers, and they need to be rewarded. We need to do everything possible to keep those industries alive and well in Ontario. So I commend the government for the particular section of the bill that allows for that kind of money to go to the entertainment tax credit.

I'm not sure whether I commend them in the same way, but certainly someone, somewhere took a great big deep breath when they were trying to do away with the labour-sponsored investment funds, which were supposed to be completely phased out. I know that the former finance minister, Mr. Sorbara, said they weren't necessary anymore and that he was phasing them out. But the government obviously took a look and found that the phase-out and the rapidity with which they proposed to do it were going to cause grievous and sustained harm in this province. Someone took a really good look at it and said, "We're not going to do that." They have extended the labour-sponsored investment funds for another year, while they take a sober second look.

I would suggest that the members in the government take that look pretty fast. To lose such an institution as this is to lose a whole pool of capital that we may desperately need, particularly if times get a little tougher, a whole amount of capital that, in the past, went into things like the BlackBerry, which I can see some members reading as they walk along. We all know that Research In Motion got some of their funds to start up from labour-sponsored investment funds, which were not generally available from other sources, and we need to keep that fund alive. We need to keep it operating. I am asking the government, if you are taking that sober second look, to really take a look at whether what you planned to do, and phase it out in the first place, was the right thing.

Giving a hiatus of one year I'm not going to say is a bad thing. I did say it was a bad thing a year ago or two years ago when it was being phased out, but I do think it's a good thing that somebody has recognized the mistake of the former finance minister.

Now to go on to a couple of things that I don't think are quite as good that are contained within Bill 44. The first one—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, I think I'm going to be fair. The first one is balance. The first one is MPAC, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. that looks after our

assessments. For over two years, since the—Mr. Marin is the—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ombudsman.

Mr. Michael Prue: Ombudsman. Thank you.

The Ombudsman came down with a scathing report about MPAC and its practices and this government, and he made a number of recommendations.

To their credit, MPAC, on the day the report came out, said they were going to implement each and every one of the recommendations that Mr. Marin had made for which they had authority and power. But there were four left over which they could not implement because it was the sole prerogative of the Legislature and the government of Ontario to implement, that they could not themselves do without government aid.

I remember thinking that two of them in particular would not take all that much for government to do. The first one was to reverse the onus, and the second one was to provide information so that a person appealing their assessment might have the full knowledge of the law and how the process was used to come to a determination as to the value of their house. I remember standing in this House week after week asking questions of the finance minister, asking members during question period, making speeches that I couldn't understand this government. When the Ombudsman had spoken so clearly and so eloquently about the changes that needed to be made, and particularly those two which were the prerogative of the House, the government refused to take any action.

So you can imagine my surprise when I opened Bill 44 and found within its four walls, within the body of Bill 44, those exact provisions. I don't know whether anyone's talked about this before, but they are actually contained there. The government, very quietly, after two years of badgering, has turned around and done what the Ombudsman said should be done. So if this portion passes, and I hope this portion passes—as I said, there are good things in this bill as well as bad ones—then ordinary citizens will have the onus reversed. That means it won't be up to them to prove that MPAC is wrong or that the assessor is wrong on their house. It will be up to the assessor to prove they're right. The citizen can start from the proposition that they're wrong, and they will now have to prove they are right. After all, they have the army behind them. They have the accountants, the planners, the money, the lawyers, the computer program and the expertise. They should have to prove that they are, in fact, right in that assessment. So I welcome what's there.

The second thing I welcome is the fact that they now have to give out the information. But what I don't like, having given kudos to the government on these two parts, is that they are virtually nowhere when it comes to property value assessment. There is nothing contained within the body of this act which should make anyone in Ontario feel comfortable.

We all know what's going to happen in approximately September or October of this year, the same thing that happens every year. People say, "What is the scariest event in October?" Some people might think it's Halloween. But no, the scariest thing that happens each and every October is when you get your assessment, when you open up that assessment and it says that your house, which last year was worth $300,000, is now worth $700,000. People open that and they stare in disbelief. That's what's going to happen, you see, because the Liberals were very smart and very cagey before the last election.

Interjection: Not smart, just cagey.

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Mr. Michael Prue: Cagey. My colleague corrected me: not smart, but cagey. Absolutely cagey, I give credit for that, because they looked and they thought, "This is going to be a political hot potato that we don't want in the next election." So they froze the assessments until after the election. Now everything is being studied, and in September it's going to be implemented, and the Liberals have this rollout of a four-year plan. Everybody is going to be whacked—not one year, not two years, not three years, but four years, and then they're going to go back into the thing again. They're hoping against hope that people will think that this little portion of the bill where they can appeal and where the reverse onus is going to do something—but they are sadly mistaken.

Every time we in the opposition stand up—the Conservatives with their plan of a 5% cap, and our plan of freezing until time of sale once a house has been purchased—we get laughed down. But I'll tell you, the Liberals won't be laughing very hard when it comes to next September. They won't be laughing very hard when people are seeing the virtual loss of their properties. We've already seen what's going to happen in some jurisdictions. We've already seen the preliminary analysis of what's going to happen in the city of Toronto, and how the downtown core is going to have to pay a lot more in terms of property tax because of assessment increases, whereas the inner suburbs and the outer suburbs are going to probably pay less.

We already know that in small-town Ontario, which have lakes and rivers around them, where people have summer and seasonal properties, those properties are going to escalate in value far more than small-town Ontario. The people who own those properties are going to get whacked out of all proportion to the services that they get and they pay for.

It has always been an anomaly to me that we charge the same house taxes for a person who has a seasonal property and may use it for two or three months of the year as somebody who lives there full-time. If you think that's strange, and I do—you live in a cottage, and you don't get any garbage pickup because they don't pick up for two or three months during the year, unless they pick up all the time, or they don't pick it up at all, so you have to take it to the local dump. You usually have to pay per bag to take it in there. Your kids don't go to those schools because they come back to the city or the town, but you pay the same property taxes for the schools. You pay the same property taxes for services like water and

sewage that you probably don't have at your cottage or seasonal property. In the end, there it is, and this government has done absolutely nothing in this bill or in its budget to remedy that. You're simply waiting until September, and I think you're going to see the storm clouds gather pretty fast.

In terms of the environment, I have to state that the budget and this document contain almost nothing that would make an environmentalist happy. The environment is a totally forgotten issue. I saw with amusement that the government planned to reduce the tax on bicycles that were less than $1,000. That's probably a good thing; I don't mind. I think people should get bicycles and I don't mind that the government wants to reduce the sales tax for bicycles. But I went into a really good bicycle shop on Augusta; I didn't just go to Canadian Tire or to Sears or someplace like that to see how much bicycles are because I do see those ads and I know that bicycles are generally $200, $300, $400—that's what bicycles are. I went into a very good bicycle shop on Augusta to look at the higher-end ones. They had over 400 bicycles for sale—

Mr. John Yakabuski: And not one of them under $1,000.

Mr. Michael Prue: No: Literally every one was under $1,000. So I was somewhat heartened to see that that was done, and somewhat puzzled by the Conservative motion, which wanted to raise bicycles to $2,000, in committee. I still remain puzzled about that because, even going into the highest-end bicycle shop in the downtown area on Augusta, they don't even stock a single bicycle above $999. I asked the man, and he showed me the most expensive one they had.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You can buy $10,000 bikes.

Mr. Michael Prue: My colleague is telling me that you can buy $10,000 bikes, but this is all that the government seems intent on doing. That's the entire budgetary measure towards the environment that is found in Bill 44 or in the budget itself.

I think that Keith Stewart said it best. I would like to quote him. Keith Stewart of the World Wildlife Fund—and probably all members of the Legislature know Dr. Stewart—had the following comment to make, which I think encapsulated it perfectly and brilliantly after the budget was introduced:

"Premier Dalton McGuinty said climate change was a defining issue of our generation ... and in the budget speech, the climate announcement was a continuation of a sales tax exemption for bicycles and Energy Star appliances."

Really, a budget that could have done so much did absolutely or almost absolutely nothing. When I contrast this to what is happening in other jurisdictions and I look at what is happening in British Columbia, whether you agree with them or not, at least there is a government with some political guts, a government that's willing to stick its neck out with a carbon tax. They really went whole hog. Whether you agree with it or not, they were willing—

Hon. Jim Watson: Is that NDP policy?

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no, you don't have any policy. What I'm saying is, you have no policy, and other ones who have some guts like that are willing to stick their neck out on a limb. But I see this government being more than willing to do things by half measures and the only thing they can talk about is reducing the sales tax on a bicycle. If that's your entire environmental policy, then the government itself should be ashamed.

I looked at what else is in this bill, like the stuff around the LCBO. This seemed to me to be kind of bizarre, and I couldn't understand the whole government's policy around forcing the Ontario licence corporation and the LCBO to finance capital expenditures rather than funding capital expenditures through current revenues, which is what they have done ever since those organizations were established. It took a while, and I had to do some research and have some people explain to me what the purport of all this was, why the government would take this action. And it's quite clear why they took the action. They are loading up additional costs on the LCBO and the OLG so that the money will flow directly to the government, so that the government's revenues can look better than they actually are and the LCBO's and the OLG's revenues will look worse than they are, so that they have to pay to borrow money which they heretofore had from their own revenues. They're going to have to go out and borrow it, and the government is not going to have to go out and borrow money that it needs; it's going to take it from the OLG and the LCBO. It's a pretty neat accounting trick, but that in fact is all it is.

So if you look at this budget measure and you look at Bill 44, you think, "Why is the government doing this?" It became apparent to me, after some research and some study, that it is only to allow an easier cash flow to the government in times of need and to force these two corporations, which before were able to make capital expenditures from within the monies they were bringing in, be they ticket sales or liquor or wine sales, to have to get it from a bank and pay the 5% or 10% or whatever the mortgage that will be required of them.

You have the whole problem in here about buying in Ontario. The government has almost no plan to buy in Ontario, and this is pretty sad. I talked about this very briefly at the start of my speech. There is, or would have been, an opportunity for this government to institute a plan to buy Ontario products; to make sure that markets remain stable enough for people to keep their jobs; to make sure that places like Thunder Bay would continue to produce railway and subway cars; to make sure that industries that were suffering, like our automobile industries, would not suffer if we bought made-in-Ontario products for use by this government; to make sure that ordinary citizens and corporations and the like kept their jobs and kept jobs flowing in Ontario. None of that is contained within the body of the budget.

I think the government has lost a golden opportunity. I talked at great length about the worsening economy for a reason, because this may in fact be the only good,

sustainable budget that this government is able to produce in its term. If the economy in the United States continues to decline, if our own economy is dragged down with it, then all of the plans that this government has announced, all of the things that they said they were going to do will be nearly impossible. Given the timidity of this budget, given the fact that none of the major goals that were set out in the last campaign, from poverty reduction to increasing jobs to helping cities, have been accomplished—none of that has been accomplished in this budget; none of that has been accomplished in this bill—I have to worry about what is going to happen if there are not sustained increases in revenue in the next fiscal year.

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I think this government is in trouble. I think they're not willing to talk about it yet, but the days and weeks and months that ensue will surely prove that point. If the government is serious, they'll start to take some very drastic and necessary actions now. But they seem content to coast along while people lose their jobs, coast along while cities slowly go bankrupt and see all their infrastructure laid waste, coast along while people might lose their homes if we don't resolve the taxation issue around MPAC, coast along in all the other things that are happening for our businesses, for poverty, for school closures, for pools and all the other things that are crying out in need. There wasn't money in this budget, and I despair whether there will be any money in future budgets.

I hope the US economy rebounds, and I hope ours rebounds with it. I do not want to be pessimistic at all, but one can only read the warning signs with a great deal of alarm. This government is not looking at those warning signs. This government is not prepared, and this budget has not and will not sustain the province of Ontario if things start to go south.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm pleased to have a few minutes this afternoon to speak on Bill 44, the budget bill, as we go through third reading.

One of the very innovative things in this budget that I think is going to be very important to the future of Ontario is the whole notion of taking research and development that is done right here in Ontario—and this goes for research right across Canada—to the next stage of commercialization and turning it into solid, good-paying jobs for the citizens of Ontario. Those companies will have the opportunity to have a tax holiday of some 10 years.

Let me relate that measure very locally, in Peterborough. Over this last weekend, the International Consortium of Anti-Virals, which is a not-for-profit drug development organization dedicated to the discovery and development of anti-viral therapies, had their sixth annual meeting in Peterborough. This is an international group of scientists who were at Trent University in Peterborough. Their mandate is to start developing new second-generation drugs for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, Lassa fever, yellow fever, Ebola and other infectious diseases that we certainly have read about and have seen very visually through the media. One of the things they looked at in their discussion was how this 10-year corporate tax exemption will help get these medicines to market. In fact, the goal of the International Consortium of Anti-Virals is to deliver to market every five years one drug that is affordable, effective and accessible to all patients in need.

I heard the member for Beaches–East York indicate that there was nothing novel in this budget. Well, here's a good example of an international consortium that's looking at a provision in our budget of March 2008 that will potentially allow us to have new drugs come into the market every five years. Ontario is an excellent place to foster that kind of development.

Just today, in the business section of the Globe and Mail, Research in Motion, which is now an international company for the production and research into the BlackBerry—I might add that Jim Balsillie, one of the founders, is a Peterborough-born and -raised resident who went on to the University of Waterloo. He talked again about the tax exemption and tax environment here in Ontario that is going to allow his company to continue to prosper, to foster new research and development. He looks at the tax structure that we introduced in Ontario in our budget in March to foster that kind of development, which I think is a very positive thing to keep adding jobs here in Ontario, the kinds of jobs that are going to be in place for generation upon generation, keeping Ontario as a leading jurisdiction for research and development into key areas, which we all think are very important to sustain a high-wage economy—those jobs that help pay for social programs and our health care benefits in the province of Ontario. So I'm very pleased that that's part of a very novel approach that was in our budget.

Let me talk about cities and towns. Mr. Speaker, like you, I have a background in municipal politics, and I go back to the days of 1997-98. I remember that all my colleagues gathered in Ottawa for the annual AMO meeting, and I remember the Premier of the day, Mr. Harris, came in and gave a very interesting speech. I was at the back of the room. He articulated very clearly how this revenue-neutral download of services was going to happen. It came from David Crombie's review of the Who Does What committee. I've always said that after this was done in 1997, it was the who-got-done-in committee, and I can tell you it was municipalities in Ontario that got done in by that supposed exchange of services that we were told was revenue-neutral.

When we got the privilege of forming government in 2003, we started the upload of some of these services that were downloaded. We're the government of uploading, and I'll give you some concrete examples. First of all, we have land ambulance. We are now back to the original 50-50 proposition for funding in the province of Ontario. Public health: We're well on the road to providing the

province of Ontario 100% funding in public health—the kinds of things that municipalities have been asking for.

In my own community of Peterborough, we made the commitment to upload ODSP, a drug benefit cost. For the municipality that is a savings of $1.3 million for their 2008 budget, and for the county of Peterborough, $300,000. Under the leadership of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who's in the House this afternoon—I know he wants to hear my remarks when it comes to municipalities—a former mayor of Ottawa himself, one of the most successful mayors of Ottawa during his time there. He certainly made a commitment to us all that the review panel in the next number of months will conclude their work, and will have a framework agreement in place to keep moving and accelerate the commitment we've made to get those services and costs back to the province, where they belong, and finally give our struggling property taxpayers, who were overburdened by that download in 1997-98, some relief.

Also in this budget—I've had a lot of calls from senior citizens about the new property tax grant that we're bringing in. Those are individuals, some of them veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War, the kinds of people who helped to build our communities and who deserve some relief, and we are the government that's helping them out with our new system of property tax grants that they'll be receiving.

A number of other things: I want to talk about the leadership of my colleague the member from Oakville. He took us this morning to have breakfast with the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association of Canada, a very diverse group representing Ford, Chrysler, General Motors and the various parts manufacturers that are part of this very vital sector of Ontario's economy. It was an interesting discussion for over an hour, when they certainly commended us, our government, on the elimination of the capital tax, the investment in the Next Generation of Jobs Fund and other ways we've come to support the auto industry in the province of Ontario. To be frank, they also gave us some further suggestions on how, for future budgets or future initiatives that we might take, to secure that industry's future in the province of Ontario.

1710

There were a number of members there this morning, and I want to thank the member from Oakville, who has been the chair of the auto caucus over the last four and a half years. He takes the opportunity to put these sessions together so that they can provide us with a very frank assessment of our budget measures, particularly for the auto sector.

I want to also talk about skills to jobs, the new $1.5-billion, three-year investment in new skills. In my riding of Peterborough we know that in order to succeed one has to keep upgrading their knowledge and their skills to match the kinds of jobs that are going to be available in the marketplace. This is an investment of some $1.5 billion over three years to make that happen. Along with the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, there has been a number of strategic announcements over the last number of weeks in communities right across Ontario to take advantage of that fund, and we recognize that.

We certainly don't have our heads buried in the sand. We know that there are some economic challenges south of the border. The subprime mortgage fiasco was a good example of not having proper oversight of American financial institutions. But we know that that spilled over into the other sectors of the United States economy, and as our largest trading partner, it certainly has an impact on economic activity in this province.

We're prepared to move ahead with the challenges that are in front of us. It's certainly the leadership of the Premier to get a fair deal from Ottawa.

I heard the other day from the official finance critic from the official opposition. I just want to go back to that for a moment, because I think people listening this evening should understand this issue of Ontario perhaps moving to a have-not status. It did happen a number of years ago, from 1977 to 1982, because a rapid appreciation of oil at that particular time skewed the equalization formula. The equalization formula is fairly complex, but I think it might be helpful if we had a seminar around here and perhaps bring in Don Drummond from TD Bank—he's a senior economist with a great reputation—to really explain how the equalization formula works in Canada based on non-resource revenue and resource revenue. From 1977 to 1982, with rapid appreciation of oil, Ontario technically was in a have-not status. The government of the day could've qualified for $100 million under equalization payments. Then they changed the formula so Ontario wouldn't qualify.

If you read Mr. Drummond's exposé on this whole issue, he said that potentially, in 2011-12, Ontario technically might qualify for equalization because of the rapid appreciation in the price of oil, today at $122 a barrel. In three years' time, we can only speculate where it might be. What that does is throw the whole formula of the equation for equalization out of kilter, and Ontario may, technically, qualify at that time. He clearly identified that it wasn't the Ontario economy, that it's not the income per capita of the Ontario economy. It's because of the rapid appreciation of a resource—a barrel of oil—in other provinces that are part of the equalization formula.

We're continually proud of the Premier who wants to get a reasonable deal from Ottawa. We send $20 billion out of this province to support, on a fiscal capacity basis, to make sure that all provinces have equal access to services that have a standard, a benchmark, right across the country. We know by commission that it's always been Ontario's role to participate and to make sure that other people have the same level of services that we do.

There are a number of other things that I'll take the opportunity to talk about. The MIII program: Municipalities across the province of Ontario were provided a framework of $450 million, a real opportunity for them to nominate a project from their municipality, and a few weeks ago we made the announcements on these pro-

grams. When you look at the number of projects, certainly in my community we're replacing a bridge. In other parts of the riding, I know that in the community of North Kawartha we're actually investing $9 million to build a new arena—the kinds of things that these municipalities have been waiting for for many, many years, these local projects that make so much of a difference in these local economies.

The other thing we're doing through the Ministry of Research and Innovation is to make key investments in those areas, in the bioeconomy, health research and other creative industries, including the digital media industry, to provide the opportunity to make sure that Ontario is a very competitive jurisdiction in which to invest.

I'll just touch upon manufacturing for a moment. There are a number of key initiatives in our budget. We're proposing to eliminate the capital tax retroactively to January 1, 2007, for businesses primarily engaged in manufacturing resource activities. Again, that's something that was touched upon by the Ontario auto parts manufacturing group this morning. We're also proposing to extend and accelerate the capital cost allowance for manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment investments made before the year 2012. We're also providing $25 million to the Yves Landry Foundation, a former president of Chrysler Canada, to support employer-based training in the manufacturing sector to improve productivity and competitiveness for small and medium-sized Ontario manufacturers. Another $25 million goes to the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters for a program to help manufacturers improve productivity and reduce waste.

We're certainly very aggressive on that front, but there are two strategies we want to employ here. Some have said that tax cuts are going to work and that's the only track we should be following. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when you take the time to read the budget, and I know you have, we essentially outlined a five-point program, or two tracks: key investments in areas of the Ontario economy, and a selected and strategic number of tax cuts.

We know that tax cuts alone don't provide fiscal stability. We know that the previous government towards the end of that term—I recognize that they had SARS and a number of other catastrophes that they had to deal with, but they were certainly banking a lot on tax cuts, and we know there was a rather large $5.6-billion deficit that was left in their hands, even though that was always denied during the campaign of 2003. We had to bring in Erik Peters, the former Auditor General of the province of Ontario, to do a special audit to confirm that, indeed, the books were not as they were presented in the election of 2003 and in fact there was that $5.6-billion hidden deficit.

Our last three budgets have been balanced—very important. But those budgets and the strategies contained in those budgets will allow investing in key areas of our economy that we all know are so important to us.

The 2008 budget also invests again in publicly funded education. We know that's the great economic equalizer. We'll continue to fund the two families of our public education systems in the province of Ontario, and we've made unprecedented investment in those areas of public education.

We've also embarked on, in our colleges and universities, a physical investment to renew much of their plant and equipment that has been aging over the years. I know that's well received in my community. I meet with the president of Trent University, Bonnie Patterson, frequently, and the president of Fleming College, Tony Tilly. They've certainly been very appreciative of those capital grants we've provided them with to renew their capital facilities.

1720

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that this Friday at 10 a.m. in Peterborough we'll be cutting the ribbon on our brand new hospital. This is a hospital that was an initiative of our government in 2004. I'm pleased to say that my colleague the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care—the former Minister of Finance is here. He helped fund that new hospital in Peterborough. At 10 a.m. on Friday, we're going to be cutting the ribbon at the new hospital in Peterborough.

I'll certainly look forward to being there with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the warden of Peterborough county and the mayor of Peterborough. We've been looking forward over the last three years, as this magnificent building has taken shape. When it's fully operational, as we ramp up the beds, almost 500 beds will be available there. It will take the place of two old hospitals that certainly served the community very well over the last 80 years, but we are looking forward to this new hospital. It'll certainly be a great day in Peterborough this Friday.

I'll also put in a plug that His Royal Highness Prince Andrew will also be visiting Peterborough on Friday, at the Canadian Canoe Museum, so many people like myself who are monarchists at heart will have the opportunity to meet the prince at the same time.

I digressed there for a moment. I'll get back to the budget, Bill 44.

One of the other things that certainly was brought to my attention over the last number of years was the business education tax, particularly for medium and small business owners in my community. It's been very well received that we'll be removing that tax over the next number of years, but particularly helpful for my colleagues who represent ridings in northern Ontario—like the member from Sudbury and the Minister for Community Safety and Correctional Services—in that in northern Ontario we're accelerating the removal of that business education tax to give them a hand. But certainly important in those—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I am looking for the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who will tell us what's actually going on in the budget. It's one of those omnibus bills, as you know, that you can't put it past—a

cautionary note here, with all due respect. There'll be several poison pills in this bill. This is the problem with it. There are certain parts, you know, when they're looking at the depreciation allowances, capital cost allowances—those are things we support. We'd encourage them to go further; the tax holiday. But there are certain things in there that we would refer to as poison pills. It's troubling, the nefarious ways that they insert these little things that we want, and yet they want things that we can't simply tolerate, like increased red tape, increased regulations, more inspectors, this nanny state stuff that we're opposed to. This is what small business has been telling us for the last decade or longer.

I was at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce this week. You had a five-point plan, and I understand that. They have a six-point plan. Do you know what it is? Cut taxes, cut red tape, improve training allowances—these are the things that small businesses are telling you. In fact, the prosperity committee that reported to you said the same thing. Ontario is not competitive. It's not just Jim Flaherty. It's the chamber of commerce. It's the Competition Bureau.

I know this budget is important. In fact, more important is Bill 35, though, the little slush fund—how to get rid of the surplus in the dark of night. Those things trouble me. We're talking about openness and transparency and accountability. None of it is here, and that is scary.

In fact, I know the member from Peterborough means well. If he was a real gentleman, he'd invite me to the opening of the hospital because Gary Stewart was the one who got that committed—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. John O'Toole: Gary Stewart, the former member, did more—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Member, please take your seat.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the minister—I mean the member—from Peterborough. Maybe he should be a minister, anyway. I listened intently to what he had to say, and there was one particular part of his speech that intrigued me. That was the part where he talked about a former government of Ontario that downloaded a whole lot of stuff to municipalities. When I listened to him, I thought that, historically, what he's saying about the download is absolutely accurate, and it's absolutely historically accurate that most of the municipalities have never really recovered from the additional financial burden, which they were singularly incapable of paying.

But then, as I listened to the rest of his speech, I kept saying, "He's identified the problem. What are he and his government going to do about it?" There really wasn't any answer or commitment to pull themselves out of it. Recognizing the problem, there was nothing in there about starting to upload, and there was certainly nothing in this budget that causes anyone a hope that things are going to be uploaded. I know what the Premier promised, that ODSP and some of the related costs will be uploaded within this term of government, but this budget did nothing even to start along that path. So it means it's going to have to take place more rapidly in subsequent years when finances are not that good.

Perhaps my friend from Peterborough might, in his two minutes at the end, explain how his government, which did absolutely nothing to assist municipalities in this budget, is going to truncate and do all of that in the three years that are left in the mandate and in the last three budgets. Certainly he was capable of identifying the problem; he just was not too forthright in terms of how he was going to solve the problem, which admittedly was started by a previous government but for which his government has done very little in the last five years.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise to support the budget bill. One of the things I want to talk about is, for a riding like Huron–Bruce, what this represents. I can tell you that this represents a significant investment in a very rural riding. Certainly the member from Peterborough explained it, the pinky swear about the downloading and how it was to be revenue-neutral. We know that simply was not the case, specifically in rural communities—the damage it did.

I know the money that was received through the roads and bridges and the MIII—what a difference it is going to make in the riding of Huron–Bruce. When we think about the rebuilding of new waterlines in Walkerton, new bridges—we can get our products going down the road—this is what the dollars represent for the people of Huron–Bruce.

So it certainly is with pleasure that I rise to support such important initiatives that are reflective of what the people want, what the people need, so that together we can move forward with a very firm understanding of the work that needs to be done. And, yes, I have to say that there have been challenges, and there will continue to be, but we know that the path to success is paved by solid investments in our communities, and that is what makes a strong Ontario. When I see a budget bill like this coming forward, I know that this is what will help the people of Ontario, by working together, and the recognition of solid investments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Member from Peterborough, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I certainly appreciate the comments from the members for Durham, Beaches–East York and Huron–Bruce.

I think from time to time, you've got to take off the partisan hat for a moment. If you really look at some of the objective things we've done in the downloading—and I've talked to my former municipal colleagues. Those are men and women, many of whom went through the downloading in 1997-98, who certainly recognize the initial steps that we've made in terms of the upload. I mentioned them in my remarks today: public health; land ambulance; and now the ODSP drug benefit, which has a

real impact in freeing up resources at the municipal level and taking those costs back to the province, where they belong.

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We've been in an issue. We all know that municipalities are looking at the issue of court security and whether that cost should be uploaded back to the province of Ontario. In my community, the city of Peterborough, that's a million-dollar burden on the property taxpayers for the city of Peterborough. Through the work we are doing through the panel, it's been a very—as I understand, because I've talked to representatives that have been on the panel, such as Doug Reycraft, and certainly these are the kinds issues that are being discussed to uplift an additional basket of costs that were downloaded in 1997-98, that never should have been put on the property taxpayer to begin with. But you've got to make a start. This government has made a start, a very progressive start. And we will continue on that track to uplift some of those costs from municipalities. It's very important because property tax, as we know, is a regressive form of taxation not based on income, and some of these costs have been a real burden. So we are in the process of the government being uploaders, not downloaders.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon on Bill 44, the budget bill. I'm just going to touch briefly on what the member opposite from Peterborough said about the partisan hats and the downloading, and this and that. They always talk about the downloading, but they don't talk about the fact that the education costs were uploaded. They don't want to give any credit where credit is due. They don't want to talk about the study that was out last week where Ontario schools are doing better. What did they give credit to? The curriculum changes that were made by the Harris government in Ontario schools to bring up the standards. What has this government done since it's been elected? It's actually lowered those standards. It lowered those standards. We're going backwards again under this government in our education standards. They talk about the partisan hats, but believe me, they wear them better than anybody.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Oh, John, you're delusional.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That was an independent review, I say to the member for Huron–Bruce—not my opinion. They gave credit to those curriculum changes that were brought in by the previous government.

This economy is clearly in trouble, and this government either doesn't want to admit it or doesn't want to take any responsibility for it. Or it's a combination of both.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: What do you recommend, John?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, the member from—I don't know what it is. It used to be Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Still is.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, the names have changed since the last election.

Mr. Michael Prue: Only to protect the innocent.

Mr. John Yakabuski: "Only to protect the innocent," my friend from Beaches–East York says.

The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell says, "What would you recommend?" It's a good question, because back in 2005 my colleague Ted Arnott—what is it, Waterloo–Wellington?

Mr. Ted Arnott: At that time Waterloo–Wellington; now Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Wellington–Halton Hills now.

He actually brought a motion or a resolution to this House to put this government on notice, to ask them to convene a symposium to look at the competitiveness of our manufacturing sector in this province so that we could actually be ahead of the game. He knew enough to see it coming, but apparently those prognosticators on the other side did not see it coming. And they did nothing, absolutely nothing, with that resolution, which maybe—I'm not going to say that would have solved all of the problems, but just maybe, if they'd actually had a plan, if they'd actually had a strategy, we might have been better prepared for what is happening today in Ontario's economy.

On one hand, the Premier says, "Steel yourselves; this too shall pass," and on the other hand, he says, "There's more to come." You never know what you're going to get with Premier McGuinty. I think he intentionally wants to be somewhat enigmatic about it because he really doesn't want someone to be able to put a glove on him. So his messages change from day to day. He tries to deflect things, like he brings in legislation such as the—

Mrs. Julia Munro: Trans fats.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —trans fats, Bill 8, and the pesticide bill, Bill 64, and the upgrading of the cruelty-to-animals legislation, trying to deflect attention from what the real problems in Ontario are. You know, you get from one day—and stuff comes out of the blue. Stuff comes out of the blue, like over at the MaRS last week, just out of the blue, "We're getting a new car plant in Ontario." Well, you think they'd have convened a press conference or done something, have some big announcement: "We're getting a car plant." You would expect that if the Premier of the province is going to make a statement like that, he'd have some kind of evidence, something to back it up—nothing. No negotiations, no talks, no nothing; just, "Please get off my back. You're asking tough questions. I've got to throw something in: 'We're getting a new car plant.'"

Mr. Ted Arnott: He's going to make a side trip to Italy, though.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, yes, he's going to make a side trip to Italy, he'll probably make one to China—although he didn't know about the virus going around in China, so now he may change his mind.

Mr. Ted Arnott: He doesn't have time to read the papers.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He wasn't able to read the papers, didn't know what was going on with the pesticide legislation. But somehow he came to the conclusion that we're getting a car plant in Ontario.

It's those kinds of statements where I think people really start to ask themselves, "Is he serious about the problems we're facing in the economy or is he just serious about protecting those 71 jobs on the other side of the House?" If he was serious, he wouldn't be so cavalier in making those kinds of announcements with nothing to back them up. Why would you say we're getting a car plant and have nothing at all to back it up?

The reason he was being questioned about that was that just a couple of days before, GM announced they were shutting down one shift at the car plant in Oshawa, sending about 800 or 900 workers on to the unemployment line. So you have to wonder about the auto strategy of this government. They pride themselves on bringing jobs to Ontario, but every time we turn around, we see that jobs are being lost in our auto sector, which is a key barometer of the health of our economy and which also determines the health of the economy to a large degree.

The other part of the economy that is a key barometer, and my friend from Beaches–East York touched on it, is the real estate market. That's showing some real signs of weakening in Toronto, that key large market, where housing sales are down in consecutive months and there's some real concern that that's a harbinger of things to come.

In the past few months we've had layoff after layoff. I think it must be over 200,000 jobs now since 2004, under this tax-and-spend regime, with no sign of relief to come because they don't have an economic plan. You'd think what we'd be debating in this House these days is an economic stimulus plan to actually do something about what's happening here. When the federal Minister of Finance cajoled this provincial government and tried to encourage them to bring in some kinds of tax relief measures, the Minister of Finance said, "We can't do that. The budget's already written." That was his comment. The budget was already written, yet in the budget they brought in the $190-million capital tax reduction retroactive to 2007. We can't deal with tax reduction, he said, because the budget's written, but then they actually brought in that tax reduction. So who is being a little duplicitous here? If you've already written the budget, how did you come up with that tax reduction? You didn't want to have direct corporate tax cuts because that would have looked like you were taking your direction from the Minister of Finance in Ottawa, but you knew you had to do something to send some kind of message to the manufacturing sector in this province that you were actually paying some attention.

Unfortunately it's not enough, as we continue to see that jobs have bled. Just in the last couple of weeks: 500 jobs in Listowel, at the Campbell Soup plant, where for 48 years that plant's been in business producing food for Ontarians' tables, and now those people who worked there are going to be looking for scraps themselves because they're going to be out of work, and that's a shame here in the province of Ontario; 48 years, and Campbell's will be gone.

Some of the things that I think this government could be doing to help municipalities, particularly rural municipalities that they turned their back on last week, when I had my gas tax bill turned down by the Liberal government—they came in and voted. They were whipped in to vote. In fact, I can tell you there were members of the government side who supported that bill. No changes were made to the bill, by the way. They supported that bill on a previous second reading and it passed in this Legislature. It failed to get any further because the election was called and Parliament was dissolved. They supported it in the past, but last week, on Thursday, they either came in and voted against it or they absented themselves from the vote. In fact, there were members who came in for one of the votes and left for the other one because they didn't want to be on record as voting against the bill. In principle, I believe, they support it, but I guarantee you, the Premier's office made it clear to them, "Don't go in there and support that bill, or else." Of course, the cabinet wasn't going to support it. Backbenchers, if they ever want to have a chance of getting inside that cabinet room, better do as the Premier's office tells them. That's what happened to that gas tax bill. That would have addressed some of the things that municipalities are talking about.

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I'm looking forward to the municipal fiscal service delivery review that we're told is coming in June. I hope that's not delayed again, because it's been delayed much longer than it should have been. We are looking forward to that to see what kind of measures are taken to help municipalities in the province of Ontario, but I'm not going to hold my breath until that report gets here either, because I do believe that probably like everything else this government promises, it will be late if at all coming. But that gas tax bill would have addressed some of those concerns of municipalities that are looking for sustainability and predictability in respect to funding from the provincial government.

The other thing I want to talk about is another horse that the Premier gets on: "Do you know there's $20 billion more being taken out of this province than is being put back into it by the federal government?" On the surface that argument may have some appeal, but let's drill down to the real details of that. If the Premier believes that's how it should be, that if Ontario puts X number of dollars into the federation, then it should get X number of dollars out, there's no need for a federal government whatsoever. The provinces should just collect all the money and keep it. But that money that he's talking about is not Ontario's money. It belongs to the people of Ontario. It's their taxes, their corporate taxes, not the government's. The government needs more money. The government is spending $96 billion. It doesn't have a revenue problem; it's got a spending problem. It likes to

spend money on all kinds of things that some people would find questionable and others might even find objectionable. But that money belongs to the taxpayers of Ontario, both corporately and individually; it is not the province's. If you extrapolate that argument a little farther, then you would say, quite simply, if the tax is collected in Toronto or Windsor or Ottawa, then those people should just collect it. Or let's take it to the nth degree and say, "Everybody, just hang on to your money. There's no need for government." That's the kind of logic that the Premier is trying to put out there as being saleable when he talks about that $20 billion. That is not the province of Ontario's money. In fact, if they got hold of it, they'd only spend it in some unworthy way; I'm quite certain of that. It is not the province of Ontario's money; it is the taxpayers' money. But he dropped that argument this week, probably because some economist told him that it doesn't really hold water.

Speaking of economists—and the member for Peterborough was talking about the lowering of taxes not being the only solution—Roger Martin, whom this government paid $1 million to do a study, came back saying that what we need to do in order to increase revenue in the province of Ontario is reduce the general tax rates, because it's the general tax rates that are discouraging business from either staying in Ontario or establishing in Ontario. His position was that we would actually increase the amount of revenue from taxation by lowering those tax rates. But the McGuinty government doesn't see it that way. They like high tax rates. They like to make sure that they're getting their cut off the top. They don't want a strong economy to increase the amount of taxation and the amount of revenue that the province would see coming in. No, they want to get their cut off the top, so the best way for them to do it is to make sure the rates are high. In fact, they're the highest rates anywhere in Canada. They're hurting our economy by discouraging people from investing here.

In fact, in Alberta they've moved to eliminate the health tax, which is going to make that province even more attractive from the point of view of dollars being kept in the pockets of individuals and corporations. They're not going to be paying the tax either as an individual or a corporation, because Alberta has come to realize that they need to make sure that their people have more disposable income. That, in turn, will get invested into that province, and manufacturers will invest there.

I do believe my time is up, Mr. Speaker. So thank you very much, and we'll catch you another day.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 5:45 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 o'clock on Thursday, May 8.

The House adjourned at 1745.

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Thursday 8 May 2008

Jeudi 8 mai 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 8 May 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 8 mai 2008

The House met at 0900.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 12, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act in relation to adoption information and to make consequential amendments to the Child and Family Services Act, when Bill 12 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That, except pursuant to standing order 9(d), there shall be no deferral of the third reading vote; and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Milloy has moved government notice of motion number 82. Debate?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the members from London–Fanshawe, Oakville and Etobicoke North.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Milloy.

Hon. John Milloy: I'll pass.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from London–Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: We're debating here today a very important topic that has been brought to the House many different times.

Interjection.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's a closure motion, yes.

In the past, this very important issue came before the House and was debated many different times. I remember in 2005, when this bill came to the House and went to committee, and we listened to many different people. I know that many people were passionate about it and spoke in detail about the importance of this subject, because for many different reasons many people who spoke about it couldn't connect with their natural parents, and natural parents couldn't connect with their kids. So we brought before this House a bill and debated it. As you know, the privacy commissioner back then, and the court, fought and ruled against it.

As you know, many different issues come to this House, and with good intentions we debate them and many people vote in support. That's what we're elected for: to reflect the needs and to manage and voice the concerns of the people we represent. As you know, many different bills and laws were passed in this province, and with changing times we open them again and modernize them and make them fit the era we live in and try to reflect the needs and requests of the people of Ontario.

This bill is one of those that came back and went to committee. We debated this bill many different times and in many different locations; we listened to many different speakers. As a matter of fact, the privacy commissioner came before our committee and spoke. She said that this bill is an important bill and should pass, because this time the bill reflects the concerns of the people of Ontario. This bill, as you know, came to this House and many people had a chance to speak and voice their concerns from every different party: from the government side, from the NDP side and from the Conservative side. I know some concerns were voiced by every side. But as a matter of fact, many people and all the stakeholders were pleased and happy with our present bill, because this bill reflects their concerns and speaks to their issues. This bill came to restore something that didn't happen in the past.

I've been listening to many different people. A mother lost her son, because she wasn't able to connect with him for a long, long time. She came and talked to us. I think it's fair; it's about time, because as we said many different times, times have changed. The secrecy is gone, and the time has come when people have a right to connect with their kids and when kids have a right to connect with their parents. That's what the bill is all about.

I know we're talking about many different child advocates; we're talking about people who need to connect with their parents. In this bill is a very important mechanism: a no-contact notice. I know many people are upset about it, but it's very important to mention. When we put this section in the bill, we know exactly how many people don't want to have a connection with their parents and how many parents don't want to have a connection with their kids, for many different reasons and issues. That's why we have a no-contact notice in this bill.

The no-contact notice will be active if this bill passes. This no contact notice will allow the kids, when they reach the age of 18 and become adults, to request a no-contact notice for connection with their parents or their families. If this section is violated by the parents, they will be subject to a fine of up to $50,000, and $250,000 for any organization or stakeholder that violates this sec-

tion. I think it's a very important mechanism to defend and protect, with a penalty for people who violate this section. Because we know strongly that so many kids for so many different reasons, when they become adults, still remember their childhood. Maybe they were abused; maybe they don't want to connect with their parents, for many different reasons. This section came to protect their interests and to protect them from any connections in the future.

0910

I know the honourable member spoke many different times about kids. We said many different times—the minister said it and I said it—and many different people said that this only applies to the adults; it doesn't apply to the kids. We have to treat adult people as adults. If we trust them to drive a car, if we trust them to drink, if we trust them to vote, I think we should trust them to have control of their records. If they wish to know about their past, they have a right to open the records and apply, and they have a right to connect with their parents.

I think this bill is important for all of us. As you know, as of September 2008, the closure veto will be replaced by a no-contact notice. I think this is very important. We listened to the privacy commissioner, who said this is an important bill. She came and spoke before the committee at the request of all members of the committee, and said that this bill has very important tools to protect people who don't want to have contact.

I think that we, as a government, listen to the people. As a government, we try as much as possible to connect with our colleagues from different sides of the House. We're trying to be reasonable, because in the end, we are here to serve the people of Ontario. But sometimes we have to act in a fashion that gives us the ability to protect the interests of the people who came and told us it is time to pass this bill. I listened to many people and stakeholders who came to our office and told us, "It's about time."

People throughout the history of this province have suffered because they have lost their loved ones. In the past, as you know, if you were unmarried, got pregnant and had a baby, in an era of family secrecy it was a sinful act. Therefore, the family and social services back then used to take the kids and put them in foster homes and gave them up for adoption, and the mother or the natural parents lost connection with their kids for years and years to come.

Many people came before, trying to connect with their kids. But there was no mechanism in the past to give them the right to connect. They had no ability to connect. That's why we came the first time, at the request of many people in this House, to open that record. The courts ordered that it was unconstitutional to have records opened totally.

Out of respect for the court, and also for the privacy commissioner, we came with a new version that reflects the needs and requests of many different people in Ontario, especially the people who are in charge of the files and know about the laws and regulations in this province, and in consultation with many stakeholders. We created a mechanism and the tools in this bill to protect them and give them the right to be connected if they want.

I think that today, after thorough discussion of this bill and debate in this House, it's very important to put closure on this issue. It's very important to finish this, because people are looking forward to going back to a normal life. They're looking forward to connecting with their loved ones, whom they lost in the past due to many rules and regulations that would not enable them to connect with their loved ones. I know that many people would be happy about the passage of this bill. This bill is an important tool to give the mother who lost her kids for adoption, organization or whatever to reconnect and enjoy whatever is left of their life together.

We know very well too that some people don't want a connection. They don't want to connect back again. That's why we created a section, the no-contact notice, for the people who don't want to connect with their parents or their kids, for many different reasons. I think this is important. When you tie to it some kind of penalty, it protects the people who don't want to be connected. If one violates those sections in this bill, they are subject to a penalty.

This has been tried in many different provinces like British Columbia, Alberta, and New Brunswick, and has been successful. I don't understand why some people object to this section or this mechanism, because it's been tried in different provinces and has shown us that this works very well. They have no violations, and the people respect the law. No doubt about it, some exceptional people can break the law; it doesn't matter what you do. That's why we created a penalty for them: to tell them that if you violate this section, you're going to be penalized.

That's why people should be happy about this section and understand that we're dealing with adults; we're not dealing with kids. I know that the honourable member brings this issue about these kids forward to the House every single time. But she has to remember that when they become adults at 18 years of age, they won't be kids anymore; they'll be adults. We trust those adults to make an important decision about their lives. We tell them: "Yes, you can vote. Yes, you can drive. Yes, you can drink. Yes, you can get married and start a family." In the meantime, are we going to tell them, "You cannot know about your past life"?

It's very, very incredible. It's unbelievable. I think when we tell people they're adults, we should respect them as adults, and we should treat them as adults. The full meaning of "adult" has to be applied to those people, because they have a right. At the same time, the parents have no right to connect or to file any request for information until that adult becomes 19 years old. They want to see that one-year gap to get the connection between the parents and the kid—when they become an adult.

I think this bill strikes a very important balance in this important issue: to protect the people of Ontario who don't want to be contacted, and also provide the ability if

they want to connect with their families.. Many stories came before us in committee. I saw a lot of people and heard a lot of people crying, who thought at one time that they didn't want to connect with their mother and father because they left them out, but they didn't know the story. When they get the chance to see their parents, when the parents get a chance to see their kids, when they get the chance to connect and reunite, the love starts again, and they enjoy every minute of it. They think, "I wish I'd had the ability to connect a long time ago."

This bill came at the request of many people who told us "We want to have a chance to be reunited with our families," "I want to be reunited with my mother and father," or "I want to be reunited with my kids." We heard many different stories, as I mentioned. I say again, hopefully, in the end, we are working for the people of Ontario, working for the people who have suffered for a long time from the lack of the ability to connect with their father and mother.

Can you imagine that you had no right to connect with your father and mother? You're an adult, you are 40 or 50 years old, or 18 or 19 years old, and you haven't seen them and don't know much about them. You want to know how they look. You want to know exactly how you got your character. You want to know why you behave in the way you behave right now. You want to see who you look like. So it's very important to restart that natural connection between father and mother and their kids.

I think it's an important bill, and that's why today we decided to bring closure to this one, because it's about time. People have suffered enough over the years. It's important to give closure to it and to establish the mechanisms for the people who want to connect with their kids and to connect with their families.

0920

We listened to the child advocate groups who came before us and told us that this is a very important decision. I think that adults should have a right to connect with their kids and to make the decision on behalf of themselves. They don't want their rights being taken away from them. We're going to tell them, "You can do one thing, but other things you cannot do." How can you treat them as adults one time, and another time you say, "You're not an adult. You cannot make a decision on behalf of yourself"? That's incredible, unbelievable.

I think people these days are smart, and they are aware of what's going on around them. They have the ability to comprehend and the ability to make wise decisions, because the tools we've been giving them these days and the education they get make them able to make important decisions about themselves. We're not talking about decisions to change a government or change a life or change many of those kinds of things; we're talking about personal stuff. We're talking about personal things. We're talking about reconnecting them with their parents. They know; they listen to their feelings, their minds, their hearts. I think they are capable enough to be able to make that decision. It's unfair and it's unbelievable that some people cannot give them that right to make the decision on behalf of themselves. We cannot act on behalf of them. So those adults, I think, know better about themselves. They have the ability to know and this bill will give them a right, when they become 18 years old, to put a no-contact veto or to say, "Yes, I want to connect with my parents." Also, on the other side, the parents cannot reach this connection until that child becomes 18 years of age. I think it strikes a good balance.

It's an important subject. Many people talk about it across the province. Probably you, Mr. Speaker, and many others in this House heard incredible, emotional stories about neighbours, about friends, about someone looking for his parents for many, many years. Very often we see it in the movies, we see it on TV, we see it on shows on TV. People are reunited and reconnected. I see the joy on their faces and the laughter because they reconnected with their natural parents, and the parents are connected with their kids who they lost a long, long time ago due to so many different traditional circumstances put on them without their ability to say yes or no—because back then it used to be a sinful act to have kids without marriage. If you lived with someone and as a result had a kid, you did not have a right to nurture that kid. Times change, and this bill speaks to that change of times. This bill came as a reflection of the people who asked us for many years and told us, "Yes, you have to put closure to it. Yes, I want to reconnect with my family. Yes, I want to start a new life again," because it's about time.

I think this time, this bill speaks to different elements and respects the rule of laws in the province of Ontario. After thorough consultations with the privacy commissioner and many different stakeholders in the province of Ontario, this bill came to light. I hope, again, we will be able to serve the people we promised to serve and hopefully will give them the right to see life again and start a new life.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak. I hope my other colleagues will have a chance to speak and explain more about the importance of this subject.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today and speak after my colleague from London–Fanshawe. This is a particularly interesting bill in that it asks us to take what is a very emotional issue and all the emotions that attach themselves to an issue like this and apply some logic to it in the form of legislation that strikes—a key word, I think, that the previous speaker used was "balance." I think that's what we've been tasked with as legislators, to try to bring forward a piece of legislation that gets the support of the House, that appeals to all people in the province of Ontario, whether they be people who have been part of an adoption process in the past in which they entered into that process under certain conditions or certain promises or certain expectations, and at the same time apply a set of rules to adoptions that are to take place in the future. I think it comes down to some of the basic human emotions, in

that we want to know who we are; we want to know what our history is; we want to know what our family is all about; we want to know what our forefathers did, what our ancestors did. I think there's just an emotional attachment to our past that we have that's innate in all of us.

Also—not more importantly, but certainly from a different perspective—you need to look at this issue from a health perspective as well. Certain health conditions, certain diseases, certain medical conditions travel throughout the generations, and there's an expectation that some of those traits genetically get passed on to the offspring. Certainly, you can use medical information to your own benefit, being a child, if you know what has happened in your past. If you know that perhaps on the mother's side or on the father's side you are predisposed to certain genetic conditions, you can do something about that now. We have the technology; we've made advances now in medical technology where you can take action within your own life to make your health a much better experience as a result of having that.

So there are a number of reasons why we need to approach this in a very balanced way. There are people in the past, as has been spoken to earlier this morning, who entered into adoptions or put children up for adoption in a different age, in a different place and time and under different expectations, and certainly under much different moral rules at the time, perhaps would be the best way to put it. The expectation was that that privacy and those agreements would be protected throughout that person's life. Now, obviously, as time has moved on, some of these children who were adopted have decided they would like to find out what they're all about—where they came from, what their family history is—and have made requests that they be allowed to do that. I think there's agreement around the House from all parties on a number of things, and one is that all Ontarians should be able to learn more about their own personal history. I think where the dispute may come in, or what the debate may centre on, is just what format that takes and just what legislation is passed to allow that to happen while at the same time respecting the agreements that were entered into in the past.

That's why introducing this new legislation, in the form of Bill 12, is going to make open adoption records, moving forward, turning a corner in Ontario's adoption laws, but at the same time, those people who have involved themselves in the adoption process in the past, whether they be adopted children or birth parents, would also have their privacy respected. What the new legislation we are talking about today, Bill 12, in effect does, if it's passed, is it allows adopted adults and birth parents whose adoptions were registered in Ontario to apply for copies of their adoption orders and birth registrations, or to register a disclosure veto in cases where the adoption order was made prior to September 1 of this year. That, I think, strikes the balance that the member from London–Fanshawe was talking of, in that we're trying to please two masters: those adoptions that are yet to happen and those adoptions that have happened in the past.

I think the legislation that is being brought forward by the government in this regard is consistent with the recommendations of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and it's also consistent with the decision of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. All adoptive children and all birth parents can still register a no-contact notice or a notice of contact preference. So I think the legislation is trying to deal with all aspects of this very emotionally charged issue. It's trying to apply some logic to this that ordinary people in Ontario can rely on if they decide to enter, in the future, into some sort of an adoptive arrangement.

Certainly, the adoption process in itself is one that garners a great deal of attention and fuels a great deal of emotional thinking. I spent 12 years on the board of the children's aid society in the region of Halton. Two of those years I served as president of that organization. I was able to see the impact that foster parents and adoptive parents could have on a child's life where that child, for no reason of their own, has found himself or herself in a situation where their birth parents are not going to be the ones who raise them. You see the huge difference that it makes in the outcome when you have people who are prepared to come forward and to take on the responsibility of being the adoptive parents of a child who simply has no one to rely on.

0930

The previous speaker asked us to put ourselves in the shoes of an adopted child, dealing with everyday issues when you are at school, perhaps, and you look around the room and you see a lot of other children in your class who know who their mom and dad are, who just haven't known anybody else since birth than their parents. Then put yourself in the shoes of a child, a young girl or a young boy, who doesn't know who their mom or dad is, who knows perhaps that they've got two wonderful people who are prepared to look after them, but don't really know where they came from.

That's the intent of this legislation: as those children move through the adoptive process and into adulthood, to allow them access to that family history that's personal and very important to them. As I said right from the start, I think all members of all parties would believe in the concept that people should be able to learn their own personal history.

Also, as we move forward, I think we need to enshrine that in legislation as best we are able to do. We had the one attempt at this; it's no secret that it took a journey through the court system and was ruled unconstitutional. I have to thank Minister Meilleur for bringing this back very quickly and asking us to deal with it with some haste, because when the previous bill was passed, I think it had the support in concept of most members of the House, certainly, indeed a majority of the members of the House, and yet the journey to get to that point had been a very emotional one and for some members very personally emotional. But I think we had reached a spot where we thought we had it right and it was time to move forward.

Now we have an opportunity to make the previous bill even better, to bring it in line with what the courts have asked us to do in their ruling. By introducing new adoption information disclosure legislation, it's going to, as I say, meet the court's demand or meet the court's request that the legislation be framed in a way that is constitutional, and also go back and meet the same tests we attempted to apply in the past when we knew we were trying to apply logic, reasoning and the rule of law to what is essentially a very emotional issue, and to one that, in the past, has been treated a certain way.

I think the views on adoption have changed. Previous speakers thought to speak about the way that society viewed unwed mothers in the past. It's simply one that has changed over the years, and one that I think the legislation we bring forward now should mirror. So it's an attempt to do what people have asked us to do in granting them the right to explore their own personal history, protect the interests of those who have entered into the adoptive process in good faith in the past and expected that good faith to be preserved throughout their lifetime, and bring a balance to the situation that I think is deserving of the support of all members of the House.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: First of all, of course it's a privilege to speak on this very important and emotionally charged issue which, as my honourable colleague from Oakville has aptly stated, is one of the flow of information as well as catering to some very deep, legitimate and long-held needs of the various communities that are involved in the adoption process.

I can tell you, as the Chair of the social policy committee that was empowered to listen to the various stakeholders across Ontario, I think we were reminded once again about how important these issues are, about the deep-seated feelings on many different sides, whether it is for full and easy access in a bilateral way with or without consent from either side, or others who were perhaps speaking more towards the privacy issues and that those privacy issues might be breached.

Of course, that's what we're attempting to do here with the amendments, with the contours that we're offering to this legislation in order to not only make it constitutional, but also, we hope, to allay some of these concerns, fears, difficulties and challenges.

I have to say as well that beyond my parliamentary capacity here and as Chair of the social policy committee, the thing that really resonated for me was the medical or health argument. As a physician, I know very strongly and well the fact that so many diseases and illnesses and various maladies and conditions have their genetic basis. When we say that, we kind of glibly attribute genetic causes, but at some point there are ways for us, as a society and as health practitioners, to try to tease that out, to try to dissect some aspects of what exactly that genetic impact may be on this generation and/or succeeding generations.

For example, there are very common conditions, probably under-recognized among the general population, that lead to chronic low hemoglobin or chronic anemia, things like thalassemia minor and thalassemia major. These are, yes, genetic disorders. These are generally passed through the male bloodline and they can sometimes be recognized only in an emergency circumstance, where an individual comes to an emergency room and for whatever reason they may be required to have their blood measured or they may have been subjected to very significant blood loss, and lo and behold, the results come back 10%, 20%, 30% below what was expected. Then, of course, everyone starts getting upset as to what exactly is the origin of it. Very often this is traced to the genetic bloodline inheritance. That's the kind of thing that somebody might want to know or might benefit from knowing very early on in their life, because, of course, there are particular measures and therapies and regimens and so on, depending on the individual case, that people can avail themselves of.

Of course, beyond that there is a whole long list, probably something like 3,000 disorders and counting that have an even stronger genetic imprint or footprint that lasts throughout the generations. Whether it's degenerative disorders like Huntington's disease, or things like Alzheimer's or early onset heart disease, these are all things that a person who deserves respect and dignity and a fair shot at a fully potentiated life ought to know and be able to access. Hopefully, with some of the contours and amendments and rethinking that's been going on with the legislation, we'll be able to address these particular issues.

As I say, there are many different streams in this adoption argument, many different areas that deserve concern, whether, as we mentioned earlier, it's the legal ramifications, the emotional impact and so on. But as I say, the thing that really resonated for me on a first-hand basis, as our participants and presenters were offering their testimony and their very deeply moving life stories, was that many of them—and indeed many of the members of the opposing parties—also mentioned this aspect of the medical information, the free and easy access to it, and of course the challenges thereof.

So there are a number of things we're attempting to accomplish with this new legislation. For example, our government wanted to take immediate steps in introducing new legislation that, if passed, would make open adoption records a cornerstone of Ontario's adoption laws. If this legislation is passed, adopted adults and birth parents may be able to receive previously unavailable information through access to information contained in original and substituted birth registrations and adoption orders, including identifying information.

The disclosure veto would only apply to adopted persons and birth parents who had their adoption orders made in Ontario before September 1, 2008. The disclosure veto is consistent with the September 2007 decision of the Superior Court of Justice and the views of Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner.

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Going forward, adopted adults will be able to apply for copies of their adoption records and birth regis-

trations. Birth parents will be able to apply for information from these documents. These documents may provide, for example, adoptees with information on where they were born, their original name at birth and the names of their birth parents; for birth parents, the new name of the child they placed for adoption, including their new name when they were adopted and where the adoption took place.

In place of this legislation, there's also a no-contact notice mechanism, which carries with it the toughest penalties in the country. Adoptees can register to put themselves on that no-contact list to protect themselves from unwanted contact from birth parents. Of course, this was a provision that was very strongly represented to us, not only by some of the participants and the presenters but also by some of our respected colleagues in the opposition parties. Non-compliance with this notice can result in a fine of $50,000 for an individual and $250,000 for a corporation. As you'll know, three provinces in Canada have this type of mechanism in place and have said that it is sufficient in protecting the safety of adoptees.

As you'll imagine, there's a lot of legalese and a lot of competing clauses and super-contingent clauses buried within this legislation. I think that's only right, given, as we spoke earlier, the supercharged nature of this whole adoption process.

But I have to say that one of the privileges of being the chair of the social policy committee was to hear first-hand from so many Ontarians who were affected by adoption. I noticed that we have in the government gallery members of the adoption communities, some of whom testified very poignantly that they had been reunited after I believe it was 20 years plus—

Interjection: Thirty-five years.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thirty-five years plus. That is something that really cannot be manufactured, cannot be spun. There's no public relations company that could come up with that, not even our own able staffers here at the Liberal Party. That is something that deserves recognition, deserves action, deserves our full support and our full respect.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: At the outset, I want to say how disappointed I am, and the other opposition members are, in truncating this debate when we've only had one day of debate. I had an opportunity to speak on this previously. Mr. Prue from Beaches–East York had an opportunity to take up only half his time that was allocated. No other member of this Legislature had the opportunity to speak, save the government members at the opening.

I consider this bill probably the most important bill that has been introduced by this government since the election. The rest of the legislation has been dealing with monetary issues, truck speed limitations—

Hon. David Caplan: Back-to-work legislation on the TTC.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Yeah, back-to-work legislation on the TTC. That was an important piece of legislation that took a half an hour in this place. It was agreed to by all parties in a co-operative manner. But the rest of the legislation really doesn't affect the future lives of so many Ontarians. This bill can affect as many as over a million people.

Hon. David Caplan: I've just demonstrated—

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: If the minister for infrastructure wants to speak, why doesn't he take some time and allow this debate to go on and use his position in cabinet? He has no feeling about the implications of this bill on the future lives of Ontarians.

This government has badly botched this bill. They have ducked, bobbed and weaved around their mishandling and lack of competence with regard to this legislation. They were warned in the previous debate on Bill 183 about the total lack of concern about the privacy of Ontarians going back prior to this time. They were scolded in this Legislature by me and my party for going back and breaking the word with the Ontario people who had put up their children for adoption and the adoptees that these records would be sealed and that they would not be revealed without their consent. We warned them about that. We said, "You will likely have a constitutional challenge," and they went ahead. I believe that that shows the total lack of regard by this government for privacy rights. They have been captured by one interest group, going forward.

I would just recommend to all of the members of the Legislature, particularly the government backbenchers, to read the decision of Judge Belobaba with regard to privacy rights and this whole issue. He has a very good, reasoned decision and some of the information in his decision is so important for all to know and to read.

For instance, we talk about a balance in this particular debate. I want to talk about page 25 of his judgment: "The feelings and the fears of the 'non-searching' adoptees and birth parents who do not want to be found are no less legitimate and no less compelling. The impact on their lives and those of their families is just as significant. The difference here is that there are few, if any, clinical studies documenting this impact because the non-searching population prefers anonymity and is hence unorganized. Unlike the searching population, it does not have lobby groups working on its behalf. But the evidence before this court is clear that opening records retroactively will be harmful to the non-searching members of the adoption triad. Lives could be shattered. The evidence is also clear that some adoptees and birth parents are not interested in being reunited. They do not want to revisit the past. And, as one adoption expert noted, these feelings and these individuals are completely normal."

We recognize, in our party, that the laws have to be changed. Societal attitudes have changed. Going forward, we agree with having a more open adoptive system. We believe in that. But what the judge points out is that the other group has never been represented in public or in front of our legislative committee.

I think the last member spoke to exactly what the effect of this law will be. After August 31 of this year,

according to the legislation, the records will be open for adoptees and natural parents to see, providing the child has reached the age of 19. At that time, then, both sides can get those records. This stands for all adoption records made before September 1. But prior to that time or after that time, either side can register two kinds of notices with the Registrar General. They can register a non-contact notice or a veto to the disclosure. They are very different in nature, in terms of what they do. If the person registers a veto disclosure, they are saying that the information will not be given to the other party about the birth records, so that privacy will be maintained by that person. Experience shows that 3% to 5% of the people in a jurisdiction will do that. As I understand it, we have about 500,000 to 600,000 adoptions that have been recorded in our province, so it affects probably double that number of people, perhaps even more. So there are a lot of people involved in this.

I want to talk a little bit about the non-contact notice. The judge also had some things to say about the non-contact notice and how it affects people. First of all, it's not a penalty of $50,000; it's a penalty of up to $50,000. Secondly, if one of the other people involved in the adoption, either the natural mother or the adoptee, is contacted and doesn't want to be contacted, what are the chances that they're going to undertake a prosecution of the person that they don't want to be involved with? It's not going to happen. It's like restraining orders that are now in place. The police are reluctant to do them. The police are not going to prosecute this kind of thing. Why on earth would somebody who doesn't want to be contacted or deal with the other party undertake a litigation process against their natural mother or their adopted child?

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The other part is, these people are not without feelings. Even though they may not want to have anything to do with them, they still understand that there is a connection. The likelihood of somebody going after or prosecuting a natural parent or a natural child is so remote it's unbelievable.

Number four: The government talks about other jurisdictions in our country that have non-contact notices in their legislation. They haven't had their legislation in place long enough to have any experience with any kinds of breaches. The oldest legislation was done in 1996; that's only 12 years old. The adoptions normally take place at a very young age—the kids aren't 18 or 19—therefore there is no experience with this particular matter.

I also want to go back to the judgment of Judge Belobaba and read what he has to say with regard to that issue: "The non-contact provision"—I read from page 33 of his judgment—"does not prevent the release of the information. As for the non-disclosure procedure, as I have already noted, the board"—oh, that's another issue which I will not bore the Legislature with.

I do want to read the other part, though, on page 60 of the judgment:

"The no-contact provision. As the affidavit evidence before me makes clear, the harm is not contact, but disclosure. The applicants object to the fact that their identities will be disclosed to persons that they would least want to have this information. Whether or not contact actually takes place in breach of the no-contact provision is a secondary concern." So the no-contact is a phony excuse with regard to an issue that I'm going to mention, going on.

"The no-contact restriction will not prevent or minimize the harm that could result"—this is in his judgment—"to the date rape victim that put her child up for adoption 20 years ago when she was young. Today she is married with her own family. She continues to live in the same community, as does the birth father. Her family does not know about the adoption. If the adoptee identifies her and tells the birth father, the birth father will spread the news through the small community and this will create great harm to her marriage, her children and to the stability of the family.

"The no-contact restriction will not prevent someone from stalking or watching or making phony phone calls or front-door deliveries. As C.M. stated in her affidavit:

"'The no-contact'" provision "'is totally irrelevant to me'"—this is a natural mother—"'because no contact will not mean that they cannot watch me, they can't drive past my house. This person could get my name and give this to the children that she has, to other friends, to relatives. It ... does not provide me any comfort whatsoever—whatsoever, other than I could be stalked.'

"The no-contact provision would not prevent the disclosure of one's identity and with that identifying information"—this is another applicant under this lawsuit:

"It would not be hard to use the Internet or do simple investigation and research in order to learn myriad details about my life and who I am.... It causes me stress and anxiety that someone with a particular interest in my identity and who I am could then find my address and learn about my interests and associations." Then he goes on about the no-contact provision. So the no-contact provision that this government talks about is a joke.

My caucus and I agree with the legislation. The former legislation, Bill 183, which was passed in 2005 in spite of our warnings and my warnings to the government about the retroactivity with regard to the veto, contained for the future the option for a small number of individuals to have a veto disclosure. The minister answers back, "Well, these people can have the no-contact provision." I think I have debunked the notion about the no-contact order. The no-contact order only relates to the person who has received the information. So in the instance of one adoptee who obtained the information about the mother or father, they can share that with their brothers and sisters and there is not a no-contact order against them. Those children, or the other relatives, can go to the parents, knock on the door or do whatever they want, and there's no penalty. They can't be fined; there can be no prosecution against them. So they can share this infor-

mation with whomever they would like. The people who receive the information are not bound by the no-contact provision. That was debunked in the last debate.

Under Bill 183, we had special protection for people who had been in severe circumstances. Our hope was that, going forward with the legislation, after September 1—when an adoption order is made, we wanted, in a very small number of cases, an option for those people to also have the right to have a veto disclosure. I don't know what the number would be, but it would be a very small number of individuals in our province; I'm guessing less than 100 a year.

What we wanted, because the children's aid society brought this before the committee in the form of a written brief which I picked up and subsequently went to the minister about before the clause-by-clause, and said to the minister, "In fairness to you, Madam Minister, I want to tell you that I'm going to introduce in committee tomorrow"—because there was a one-two kind of process on this bill, which I disagree with as well. I think that, seeing an amendment coming and wanting to make the bill better, the government would have been much wiser to postpone the clause-by-clause and deal with this bill in a reasonable and logical fashion, especially given the fact that they had been struck down by the courts on their first try.

But what we wanted to do was to say, if the children's aid society was forced to take a child out of a home and then the court ordered, as they do in a very minor number of cases—one in 100, in terms of children's aid society intervention—that the natural parents not only had lost custody but they lost access to the child—this happens in only one out of 100 kids that the CAS is forced to take out of the homes, because the CAS tries dearly to put those kids back into the family home. That's their first objective. When that is an impossible situation, primarily because there has been severe abuse to those small number of kids—attempted murder, starvation, rape, serious assaults, those kinds of things. In most cases, I'm told by children's aid workers, these are cases where there's mental illness in terms of the natural parent or there is severe drug abuse in that home. They take that child and put them in an adoptive home, and that new adoptive name is not released to the natural parents, the perpetrator of the crime, these violent people. These kids are truly victims of our society, victims of crime. Sometimes their parents are charged with criminal offences and sometimes not, but in most of these severe cases, they would be charged with some kind of criminal offence.

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What we wanted to do—and I was supported by the NDP in the amendment, which I warned the minister about the day before—is that in the extreme number of small cases we wanted a half-a-block—not a full-block—veto on the disclosure, so that the child, when he or she reached the age of 19, could say, "I want to keep my adoptive name secret from my natural parents, because I'm still reliving the horror of the abuse that took place during my childhood."

You know, it's odd that this week, when we're celebrating Children's Mental Health Week, we're moving closure on this kind of debate and we're being refused a reasoned amendment with regard to this one matter. What we wanted to do was, when the kid reaches 19, they're put in control of when they might want to take off a veto. The children's aid society would file a veto. Once the child is 19, the children's aid society is out of it, and it's in the hands of the child.

I also had in my amendment, in favour of the abusing parent—things do change in life in those kinds of things—an opportunity for the abusing parent to challenge the veto in an appeal sense, so that they would have an opportunity to challenge what the CAS had done in imposing this veto on behalf of the child. My amendment didn't prevent the child from finding out about the parents. And you know what? The parents already know about the child. They had the child probably for three or four years of their life, and they know a little bit about the child, but I wanted to put the power in the hands of the child who had been psychologically, emotionally damaged.

I talked to adoptive parents of one of these children, who said to me that every day that child is with her, they have to deal with this emotional, upsetting psychological harm the child has had. It's hard for me to imagine that every one of these children who has been severely abused doesn't suffer some form of mental illness. Why would we put the stress on that child and on the adoptive parent that, when that kid reaches 19, the abuser, the criminal, is allowed, in this legislation, as a matter of right, to find out the adoptive name of their child whom they so badly abused that a court had said, "We're taking you away, and we're not even going to give you access to your child, because you've been such a horrible parent."

I just don't understand. We go through this legislative process—I've tried to be as reasonable as I possibly can with regard to putting forward my amendments. I've shared them, as I said, before bringing them, and I heard this awful, patronizing crap coming back from government members with regard to this balance that they had reached between the people who wanted more open disclosure and the other people. But there hasn't been any balance. As Judge Belobaba pointed out, the people who want anonymity and would argue the other side of this case have never been there. They can't organize, they're not lobbies etc. I might add that Judge Belobaba also points out that there is no conclusive evidence with regard to what happens after the disclosure of this information. All the sociological studies have been one way and, because of the nature of the anonymity and privacy part of it, the researchers just don't find out about the bad stories with regard to adoption disclosure. I believe that in most cases they are happy reunions, and this is what is good for both the adoptee and the natural parent, but it isn't always that way. The research, he says, is skewed one way as opposed to the other.

I don't know. Given that Bill 183, the previous bill, had this protection in it, I just can't understand why the government wanted to drop this protection for some of

the most vulnerable people in our society: kids who have been beaten up by their parents, who have psychological problems. We put additional stress on them and the adoptive parent. As I said before, these people are saints. People who adopt these children are people who are saying, "I'm going to put my life aside for a young person who has real issues, and I'm going to deal with this as we go forward and I'm going to help this child out, even though I'm not the natural mother or father." I have so much respect for those people. I say to the members opposite: Why would you not put the power in the hands of the individual?

I talked to the privacy commissioner about my amendment. The privacy commissioner, as you know, supports the government's legislation now. She didn't support it before because of the retroactive effect of breaking privacy rights. But she indicated to me that if the Legislature decides to further amend Bill 12 to provide additional privacy protection through a prohibition against disclosure where the adopted person was a victim of abuse by the birth parent, the commissioner would offer no objection. In other words, the privacy commissioner has said in writing that she would have no objection to my amendment. That letter was to me, but in the spirit of trying to move this place, I shared that with the minister. I said to the minister, "Look, the privacy commissioner has no objection to my amendment," because I thought that the minister before tried to intimate that there might be some objection to the amendment. It's quite clear that the privacy commissioner would be in support of more privacy rights for vulnerable people, which is her general position.

I talked with the advocate for children, and the advocate for children said this: "It's clear that children who have been adopted should retain control over information about themselves. If they do not wish information to be shared, they should have the right to withhold this information." We're not going to do that in this legislation. At the age of 19, that is going to be turned out with regard to future adoptions after September 1. But what I wanted to do was, in this particularly small number of cases, say that the government should institute the option of a veto disclosure going forward.

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I do want to thank a number of members of the government caucus who have come to me privately and said, "I agree with you, Norm. I wish we could support your amendment." I want to thank them personally for their support over the last two weeks. That included, I might add, a couple of ministers, at least.

I've been in this Legislature a long time, and my tie with privacy and information issues has been long. I was responsible for that area of law from 1981 to 1985 in Premier Davis's cabinet. So I fully understand, I believe, the issues relating to privacy. I learned at that time how important privacy issues are to the public at large. Notwithstanding that, I understand as well, as does my caucus, that going forward there is a change in society with regard to adoption records and we're willing to accept that. But we have to have some special provisions in dealing with very special people. I'm disheartened that the legislative process has failed in this regard. I'm disheartened because I think we and I acted in an honourable way with regard to the amendments I brought forward. I think the reaction has more to do with saving face than it has to do with doing what is right for the people of Ontario going forward.

I guess the only saving grace here on this issue is that, as this will only be for adoption records after September 1 of this year, the next government will likely have the opportunity to change this law. They will have the opportunity because there will be few adoptions made of children more than 14 or 15 years old; I doubt if there will be any in the particular circumstance that I have. I want to say that I fully intend to talk about this in the next election. I fully intend to have the party that I represent, the Progressive Conservative Party, say to the electorate, "We're going to change the law in this regard to protect these victims of abuse." I'm going to go on the stump. I'm going to go to as many ridings as I can, and say to people, "The Liberal government is an uncaring government. They don't care about children. They're on the side of the perpetrator of the crime. They have little feeling about kids who are the most vulnerable in our society." I'm going to talk about the no-contact provision, about what a phony farce that argument is, about how anybody can stalk somebody, they can watch somebody, and that a judge is very unlikely to ever make an order under this provision of the law. I'm going to say that one of the first bills a Progressive Conservative government would bring would protect these kids who are so in need of protection going forward.

I don't understand the government at all on this issue. I guess they think they're going to appear weak because they listened to the argument and changed their legislation. My view of this place is that if a government listens and changes its position, it's a sign of strength, a sign of confidence that they can listen to a reasoned argument and make a change.

This phony baloney about a balance: Read Judge Belobaba's decision about balance, in terms of this particular matter. There is no balance here between the right to privacy, in certain special circumstances, and the right of the perpetrator of a crime to find out.

The argument I heard from the parliamentary assistant that when these kids are 19, we've got to treat them as adults: Yeah, we treat these kids who have emotional ages much younger than their chronological age as adults. Kids who are 19 have the emotional age of 12- and 13 year-olds because of the abuse that has been brought upon them. I don't understand how on earth the parliamentary assistant can stand up and say, "We're going to treat these people like adults because they are adults. We're not going to provide them with protection because they are adults." They can put up with their abuser, they can put up with the parent who beat the shit out of them. They can—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I withdraw that. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I got upset.

I don't understand this, and I will fight it. I will fight it if I have to go through another election to fight it. I will be in every one of your ridings talking about this. I will be in your ridings. I will get to the regional press, and I will talk to them about your lack of care for our kids. It's disgusting.

Your Premier talks about being a leader on issues like the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is a minor issue in relation to this. I know lots of people are upset about it; I'm upset about it. But I'll tell you, when I talk about kids and about protection for kids who need protection, there's nothing more important in what we do.

Before, in this debate, I have represented the interests of people who were not there to represent themselves. I represented before, in this debate, the privacy of mothers who had been raped, in terms of their never wanting information to get out about their connection to the child they gave up 30 years ago. It was only through my debate before that the government brought in a half-baked kind of amendment to protect that privacy. That's the reason it went to the courts and the court struck it down.

I went to fight for people who weren't lobbying me. I guess what bothers me most about Dalton McGuinty and his government is that if you have a lobby group, you win. Sometimes lobby groups are overzealous about their positions. They don't balance in a reasoned way between the rights of one and the other. They have extreme views. That's how lobby groups operate. They have extreme views. It's up to us, who represent all the people, not only the people who are vocal and can get a lobby group together. It's up to us to represent the people who can't be there. It's even more important that we represent the people who can't speak up for themselves.

I and my caucus are speaking today for kids in the future who are going to be badly abused by their parents, and who have no political clout. There's not a vote in this province that will be garnered from this group of kids; there won't be a vote in the whole province on it. But I believe most strongly that the most important duty of a legislator is to speak for those who are vulnerable, those who can't speak for themselves. I'm so proud of my party and my caucus for standing behind me and saying, "Norm, we're with you, because you're right. You were right before with regard to the privacy rights."

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I don't understand the arrogance of this government that got it so wrong before and will not listen to reasoned debate on this particular issue. I don't understand their arrogance and their uncaring attitude toward some of our most vulnerable kids. I am furious with them, and I will do everything I can to change this law in the future. I've got to tell you, I've had some success in the past and I hope to have success in this. I know I've got my guys behind me. I know the NDP is behind me.

We would have loved to vote for this bill because we think it generally goes in the right direction, but this issue is so important to us that we cannot support this bill on third reading.

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise in this House to speak, first of all, to the closure motion, which I find appalling. I have been in this House many times for closure motions and I have to say, generally, I don't like them. This closure motion has been invoked before the parties have even had an opportunity to put up their principal speakers.

As the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills stated, the government had an opportunity to stand up and wax eloquent about why they thought this was a wonderful bill. Then an opportunity was afforded to the Conservative Party to speak to the bill in their leadoff, and the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills did a very capable job on that day of accomplishing that. It then turned to me, on that day of debate, to speak about the NDP's position. I barely got into my speech when time ran out. I accept that. That happens to me a lot, having a bifurcated speech—give a part one day, give a part another day. But as I was about to come back this morning to give the remainder of my speech, I discovered that the government intended to invoke closure. I guess I can get some of it in in the closure motion, but it means that they don't even want to hear what the opposition parties have to say. They don't even want to hear from members, other than those who might have an opportunity to give an initial speech on this very important bill. No doubt there are literally 10, 20 or 50 members of the House who want to stand up and speak on this bill, either in support of it or in opposition to it, and that opportunity is not being given.

For the life of me, I do not understand, with so little on the agenda, with a time period up until the middle of June and only a few bills remaining, why the government needed to invoke closure in the middle of the opening arguments, and I am appalled that this government has done this. I am appalled that government members stood up and spoke about welcoming debate. They did not welcome debate at all. They have simply acted in an undemocratic fashion in this House, which is supposed to be the democracy of the people. They have acted to make sure that those who want to speak are not given an opportunity. I have to say, I am ashamed and appalled for those government members, because if they don't have the good sense to be ashamed and appalled themselves, then someone needs to do that for them.

I stood here and listened to the government spin around the bill. The government's spin is all about, "We're doing all these wonderful things." I agree with the bill, but the spin of the government had nothing to do with why this bill is before us. They never once mentioned the decision of Judge Belobaba—

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I did.

Mr. Michael Prue: You did today, but not the first time.

They never once mentioned that the reason this was here before us is because the courts ordered it back. We, as a Legislature, have to be mindful of what the courts

and the Constitution and the Bill of Rights have to say, and that is why the bill has to be changed.

I listened to what the government had to say and I listened intently to the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills on the last occasion. He made a very impassioned and real argument about one of the shortfalls in the bill. Certainly, I am mindful of it; I am wary of it. I understand how people who have been the subject of abuse, children who have grown up in terror or in horrible circumstances, may want to protect their identity beyond the age of 19. I fully understand the argument that he had to make.

When I began my speech on the last occasion, a speech which was not completed and now never will be, I talked, first of all, and made it abundantly clear that notwithstanding what had happened in the committee, notwithstanding that my motion had not been successful—that would have been a motion to strengthen the right of adoptees to find out about their birth parents, even stronger than what had been contained in the original bill—and notwithstanding the fact that I supported the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills on his amendment in order to protect the victims of abuse, I would support the bill. I'm not standing here in opposition to the bill. Notwithstanding what has happened, I still intend to proceed and vote for the bill. It has been a long time coming, and for the 99% of adoptive parents, birth parents and adopted children who want to reunite and find out their roots, I have no real problem with this bill.

But I went on to talk about the problems with the bill, and there are two. The first one is that it does not allow people an opportunity to try to investigate whether or not their birth parents are still alive. If the birth parent was born in Ontario and died in Ontario, then there is no real problem, because the registrar of births and deaths will be able to look and see whether the birth parent has died, and will inform the adoptee that his or her birth parent has now died and the records will be unsealed and the adoptee can find out. The problem in the amendments that I tried to proceed with through the committee stage was to have it ensured that if the birth parent dies in a jurisdiction other than Ontario—and there are some provinces with whom we share information—the adoptee can find out, or can have reasonable access, or can have people within the civil service check the records to see whether, in fact, that may have happened.

I gave a story—I can just imagine it now—of a person 75 years of age or so going in and saying, "I believe my mother, who would today be over 100 years of age, may be dead." They say, "What's her name?" He says, "Well, I never did know that, but I do have a birth date, because I'm entitled to that. I have a birth date and my mother, if still alive, would be 100 or more than 100 years of age." They say, "We can't do anything without a name." That 75-year-old person walks out the door and might never, ever find out. It seemed unreasonable to me.

I stated on the last occasion, in my discussions with Dr. Cavoukian—we went back and forth, and she said that although she didn't like the amendments that I had proposed, there needed to be a mechanism and that she would help me work on a mechanism to open that up so that there could be a reasonable presumption, after a period of time, to have people given an opportunity and the civil service to help them to determine whether or not a parent had died, if not in Ontario, then in another province or in a foreign jurisdiction, so that those birth records could be unsealed. We were not successful. Notwithstanding that, I informed the House that I intend to vote for the bill.

I was about to speak, on the last occasion, about my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills and his impassioned speech on protecting the children of abuse. I didn't get there, so I'm going to have to spend whatever remaining time I have today, which is about 16 minutes, talking about that particular aspect of the bill. I know there are some who fear reopening this debate, or looking at the debate and whether or not we need to ensure privacy protection for a minority. Certainly, it was not a factor when Bill 183 was passed by this House in the previous Parliament. It was not a factor because it was in the bill, but it's out now. I think it's out to the detriment of those who may have suffered from abuse.

Now, I read the letter from the children's aid society, and I read it intently. They were the ones who first red-flagged the issue. They were the ones who said that we need to take a very strong and good look at this, as to whether or not the victims of abuse should be put at risk.

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I, too, was a member of the children's aid society here in Toronto for a number of years, both as the mayor of East York designated by Metropolitan Toronto council as it then was, and later on as a member of the megacity council of the city of Toronto. I was appointed to the children's aid society. I went to many, many meetings and discussions about cases and case files and policies related to children who had been literally taken from their homes. In the majority of cases, it's not that they were taken from their homes for violence or sexual or psychological abuse. Very often they were taken from their homes because the families were incapable of caring for them, often because of alcohol problems, drug problems, mental disease problems, problems of psychological breakdowns, sometimes even just poverty. Families became incapable of looking after their children, and with most of those the children's aid society worked strenuously to try to reunite the children with their families after the problem had been resolved. In some cases they were very successful, and I compliment and applaud them for the very difficult work they do.

But in some cases, the children had to be physically taken away from their parents for a whole range of things: things like incest, things like rape, things like violence and beatings and starvation and things that we would consider too horrible to imagine. Those children are taken away from the parents literally against the objections of those same parents. They are taken away, they are put first of all in foster homes, and then from foster homes, if they are young enough and lucky enough, they go to the homes of a willing family and are adopted.

I was also, as a member of the Metropolitan Toronto council and later the council of the city of Toronto, on the children's abuse committee of Toronto. It was a society that was right on Yonge Street just north of Davenport; we went to meetings. It was about the abuse of children and what happened to children who were abused, and not only what happened to the children who were abused, but their mandate was also to work with the abusers to make sure that those abusers did not continue in their actions. It was a gut-wrenching experience. It was a difficult experience to see the programs that were designed for young children who had been the subject of psychological or sexual abuse in their own homes, usually by members of their own families.

It was also a gut-wrenching and difficult experience to see the programs that had to be developed for the abusers themselves, abusers who often saw nothing wrong in what they were doing, abusers who, in some cases, could be counselled, in some cases could be helped and in some cases seemed to me to be beyond that understanding or willingness to change their ways.

The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills made a reasoned argument in committee. He said that those children who had been subject to abuse, who had been taken away by the children's aid society, who had been lucky enough to find willing adoptive parents and who tried to put the psychology and the horror that happened to them in their young lives behind them, needed assistance. We need not, at the tender age of 19, open up that wound and tell the assaulting parent, the parent who had committed rape or incest upon them, of their whereabouts, of their name and who they were.

The no-contact veto, in my view, is not strong enough. I heard what the minister had to say in this House, but in my view, it simply was not enough. I concurred with the motion from the Progressive Conservative Party, and I concurred that we needed to do more. But in so doing, I also asked the member who put forward the motion, the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, about people who had changed, because as a member of the child abuse committee of Toronto and as a member of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto for those many years, I understood that sometimes people change. Even an abuser, if the drugs are removed, if the alcohol is removed, if they have received psychological or psychiatric counselling, or social work had been done—even an abuser who had been sent to jail and who had learned through mental anguish and everything that happens to a person in jail, and had had an opportunity to reflect, could conceivably change.

I did not want, nor do I want, to keep that parent away from that child for all eternity. What he suggested was very rational: A child who is still afraid can say, "I don't want this," and a parent who is insistent upon seeing the child can appeal. The appeal can be heard and it need not be a lengthy one, but I think that some board or some body at some point needs to look and satisfy themselves that the person has changed, that the psychological or the psychiatric counselling has worked, that social work has worked, that jail has worked, that a person showed remorse and was unlikely to offend or do it again. Then there could be an opportunity for those people to reunite and to assuage the fears of the young person who had been treated so miserably and so poorly.

I said that and I understood that, and we talked to Dr. Cavoukian about not only the motion that I tried to put forward—she's agreed to work with me on that one—but also what the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills had put forward. There was agreement and general consensus that it could be done and that it should be done. But we come to this House and instead of trying to work in an atmosphere where we are trying to assist the bill, even a bill that I'm going to vote for—I am simply trying to tell you that this bill could and should be made better. There is total reluctance on the government side to do something which I think would strengthen the bill—to allow people to get to know their parents once a certain age has passed and the parent is likely dead, and to protect the victims of physical and sexual violence. It appears not to be.

We've received a letter, and it's already been read into the record, from Dr. Cavoukian. We also received a letter the other day from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, in a letter dated May 5, made it very abundantly clear that this process ought not to be delayed, and I respect that. Agnes Samler, the Provincial Advocate, said, "Let's not delay this process."

But then she went on and made some very telling statements about her position and the position of youth with whom she had consulted that I do not believe have been reflected at all within the body of this bill, and that should have been reflected. She writes on the second page of her letter:

"The concept of having personal and identifying information made available to biological parents may be overwhelming and could provide an ongoing threat to children in their developing years. Any legislation should not simply rely on the fact that a young person has reached a particular age but should take into account the potentially negative effects of sharing information without the consent of the affected young people."

This is part of the problem with the government's position that once you turn 19, you are an adult, and an adult is an adult is an adult. What she has clearly stated is that there is a potentially negative effect of sharing information that should not be meted out at the day one reaches the age of majority.

She went on to state in her letter on the same page:

"Another concern expressed by young people is that all of the attention was focused on the wording of the legislation and the rights of adults. What resources would be available to the young person who opens up communications with the biological family, finds the process extremely painful and guilt-ridden and wants to close the door to that relationship? Who will provide the resources and support them through that process?"

This has not been canvassed within the four walls of this legislation. This has not been spoken about in this

House. Quite frankly, I think the government needs to start looking at the reality of what the bill is going to contain.

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Finally, in this letter, again on the second page, Ms. Samler goes on to state: "As Canadians, we have accepted and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 of that convention states: 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.' Article 12 goes on to state: 'The child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child.' This current bill demonstrates that we are not yet prepared to fully meet our promises under the convention."

In the government's hurry to ram this bill through without debate, these voices are not being heard. In the government's hurry to ram this bill through without debate, members of this Legislature are incapable of standing up and speaking to the provisions of the bill that are still troubling. As I stated earlier, I am generally in support of the bill. The bill will do what my colleague Marilyn Churley, the former member from Toronto–Danforth, attempted over many years to do, what people in this House have fought for for a generation: to have the adoption bill opened and to have the adoption bill work for the benefit of the adopters, the adoptees and the biological parents.

I do not want to stand in the way of the passage of the bill, but I am asking the government—they should care for the ramifications. They should listen once in a while to what others have to say, be it an opposition member, be it the privacy commissioner, be it the advocate for children or be it the children's aid society. These are important voices that have not been listened to. These are important voices that have something to say.

I heard what the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills had to say, that luckily there probably won't be too many people adopted between September of this year and the election of a new government some three years after that date who would be subject to the potential abuse. I would suggest that even one child who might fall through this crack is one child too many and that the government, in its haste on this day to push through this bill, is doing a disservice to the children of this province and is doing a disservice to those who have been the subject of mental abuse and is doing a disservice to those who, through age and time, may never be able to find out who their birth parents are. That causes me some considerable consternation. It causes me some considerable grief.

In my 20 years in political life, I find this often to be a very frustrating place. In municipal politics—and anyone who was ever in municipal politics in this House knows—when somebody within the council comes up with a good idea, even though that person may oppose you from time to time, you listen to the good idea and you incorporate it. In this House, no idea, other than something that originates on the government bench, is ever given any credence or credibility. In this House, the government, in its attempt to push through bills like this without actually listening to the privacy commissioner, without actually listening to the child advocate and without actually listening to the children's aid society or those who would speak for them, quite frankly, has done a disservice to all.

Having said that—and I again go back to my original position—I realize that the number of people who will be affected by not including this is small. I have stated, as I have stated from the beginning, that I will be supporting the bill, and I am sure that most of the members of my caucus will be supporting the bill on third reading. But we are extremely upset at the way this government has rammed it through. We are extremely upset that they—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: Their catcalling says that they're vulnerable on this, I think.

I will be voting for the bill, but I would much rather be voting for a bill that did everything that this bill should be doing, rather than doing a job that is only half good.

Mr. Speaker, I understand it's about the time. I will continue on the next date.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The debate stands adjourned.

Debate deemed adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce some guests to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the member from York South–Weston, I'd like to welcome Kristina Madonia, a teacher from Weston Collegiate Institute, and the students from Weston Collegiate Institute, who will be visiting the Legislature this afternoon.

On behalf of page Mikaela Henderson, in the east members' gallery: Brenda Henderson, her grandmother, and Sara Henderson, her cousin.

On behalf of page Vanessa Chiarello, in the west public gallery: Rosa DiBrina, her grandmother, and Vincenza Chiarello, her mother.

On behalf of the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, we'd like to welcome Madame Guitha Bruyère and Madam Lucile Bruyère in the east members' gallery. They're from Club Joie de Vivre in Embrun, in the member's riding. I'd like to welcome them today.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Given the number of interjections yesterday, I sense that some clarification around the sub judice rule might be helpful.

Sub judice, in brief, is a voluntary restriction on the part of a legislative body to refrain from discussing matters that are before a judicial or quasi-judicial body. In

other words, it is a self-imposed restriction that the Legislative Assembly places upon itself so as to avoid prejudice to a judicial case. At its core is the principle that the separation between legislative and judicial bodies is to be respected.

The sub judice convention is intended to apply to statements, debate and question period.

As, quite apparently, members are well aware, in Ontario, we have codified the sub judice convention in standing order 23(g).

However, until 1970, Ontario did not have a sub judice rule; instead, practices and customs at Ottawa and Westminster served as the basis for the Speaker's decision.

In 1966, Speaker Morrow delivered two rulings which (a) set out more precisely the interpretation to be given to the sub judice rule, and (b) gave some leeway for debate on civil matters not yet set down for trial, thus loosening a stricter prohibition on debate by way of a 1964 ruling by the same Speaker.

Then, in 1977, Speaker Rowe cited and endorsed several principles enunciated by a committee of the Canadian House of Commons which implied an even less restrictive interpretation of the rule.

These rulings formed the basis for a new sub judice rule which was adopted in 1978 and remains today.

Notwithstanding that Ontario has a standing order on sub judice, historically the voluntary nature of the convention makes it difficult to outline the jurisdiction of the Speaker.

With respect to question period particularly, Speakers here and in most other jurisdictions have adopted the practice of minimal responsibility with respect to the sub judice convention, principally leaving it up to the member who asks the question and the minister to whom it is addressed. (This is largely borne out in the Ontario precedents, with Speakers rarely interfering. The last time on record that a Speaker ruled a question out of order based on sub judice was Speaker Turner in 1982.)

The reason for this approach is that it is impossible for the Speaker to know which cases are at which stage in every instance and that the minister involved is in a better position to judge whether engaging in the discussion has a danger of causing prejudice.

The minister has the option of refusing to answer the question on grounds of sub judice, as has been set out most often in these situations.

Additionally, the problem facing a Speaker is that for him or her the determination when a comment will have the tendency to be prejudicial is speculative—that is, it cannot be done until after the remarks have been made.

Thus the Speaker will exercise his discretion with respect to the convention only in exceptional circumstances, when it is absolutely clear that doing otherwise would unfairly influence a judicial proceeding.

In 1976, there was a House of Commons special committee set up to review the "rights and immunities of members." The committee considered the sub judice convention and recommended that "when there is doubt in the mind of the Chair, a presumption should exist in favour of allowing debate and against application of the convention."

It is this long-standing practice that I have and will continue to apply to this House, interfering when and only when I am entirely satisfied, as standing order 23(g) says, "that further reference would create a real and substantial danger of prejudice to the proceeding."

Having said that, I would caution all members to be mindful of the rule, its history and its purpose, and to take excessive care that they avoid making comment on judicial cases that might have the effect of being prejudicial to proceeding before the court of record.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Deputy Premier. We know Premier McGuinty is adept at using announcements and photo ops to distract from his government's mismanagement of the economy. As we witnessed two weeks ago, he'll make an announcement even when he doesn't know what he's talking about.

Without question, the most disturbing comment he has made recently is his express concern for the use of Lord's Prayer in this assembly. Can the Deputy Premier explain why Premier McGuinty is suggesting removal of the Lord's Prayer from proceedings of the Legislature? Just who is asking him to do so?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the government House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: It is something that's being sent to an all-party committee. I also note that we are the only Legislature where the Lord's Prayer, exclusively, is said by the Speaker of the House. That is something that's being reviewed by an all-party committee, and obviously, we look forward to hearing what all parties have to say.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Since March 17, we've had 117 petitions tabled in this House opposing removal of the Lord's Prayer. That's representing over 23,000 Ontarians. We're told this week that the government's website dedicated to the issue crashed because of the flood of e-mails opposed to Mr. McGuinty's proposal.

When the Premier was asked if the overwhelming opposition might change his mind, he said, "No way." That response raises questions of trust. Will the House leader assure us that the recommendations of the committee looking into this issue will be brought back to the House and the government will not blindside the opposition and the public expressing concern, like they did with their so-called family-friendly rule changes, where they bullied what they wanted through this place with no consultation and no compromise?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, the recommendations by the legislative committee will, obviously, be made to the Legislature. The reality is that this is something the

Speaker himself is going to have to consider as well, as are all members of this Legislature. It is a legislative matter, after all, and not a government matter, although I'm happy to answer the question.

I think that this is something that will involve some discussion and some consultation. That's why we have a committee sitting together to consider this. I can't imagine a more appropriate consultation—by legislators, of legislators—than an all-party committee. We look forward to its recommendations.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think you can understand the reservations on this side of the House. When there was a family-friendly committee formed, it was totally ignored.

I want to make it abundantly clear that the official Progressive Conservative opposition is adamantly opposed to removal of the Lord's Prayer from legislative proceedings. This is an issue of significant concern to a great many Ontarians. It has to do with the history of this place, the history of this province and our great country.

Ontarians have a right to know where every member of this Legislature stands on removal of the Lord's Prayer from our proceedings. I ask the House leader if he will commit his party to a free vote on this important issue.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Of course, the whip will deal with issues of whipped votes. The question of whether or not something even goes to a vote is something that presumably the legislative committee will deal with. I'm not going to prejudge the findings of the committee. As the Premier said, this is an issue that has been considered by our public education system. It's an issue that has been considered in a variety of governmental and public contexts.

I certainly would be more than happy to share my views with the member, but what's important here is that there's a legislative committee looking at that. I would ask the leader of the official opposition to acknowledge that we ought to let the committee do its work and to not prejudge the committee's deliberations.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. A recently released report states that in the province of Ontario there is an existing threat of a C. difficile outbreak. It also states that control of this strain requires measures beyond normal infection control procedures. That being said, Minister, why have we not heard from you or your ministry about this situation?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think that the matter of infections in hospitals is an often spoken about and much publicized challenge in health care environments, and one would only need to Google to understand that.

If the member is speaking more specifically about circumstances which we've all become aware of just in the last day or so related to Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital, I can tell the honourable member that we're going to take measures, working with the Ontario Hospital Association to add C. difficile as a reportable circumstance. This will dramatically enhance the transparency associated with these challenges which do occur from time to time in Ontario's hospitals. I think this will be a very, very substantive improvement, enhancing the public's awareness of these challenging circumstances in hospital environments.

Ms. Laurie Scott: And I thank God for the good work and the outstanding effort done by the staff at Joseph Brant hospital in dealing with this situation on their own. They're certainly a leader in the province.

As minister responsible for the management of health care in this province, you should be able to take the necessary steps to ensure that when people go to a hospital for treatment today, or a long-term-care home, they don't end up dying from this very dangerous superbug. Can you tell us today how many hospitals and how many long-term-care facilities in Ontario are dealing with similar outbreaks of C. difficile, and if you don't know, how can you guarantee Ontarians today that hospitals and seniors' facilities are safe?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think the honourable member herself, as a former health care worker, would understand that the responsibility and obligation associated with the management of challenges like C. difficile is not something that a head office of a ministry manages. It requires everybody to be aligned in that regard, and when we think about C. difficile, it really does reinforce the absolute and sheer necessity of very aggressive policies, like handwashing, which is really about the behaviour of individuals in the hospital environment, be they staff, visitors or patients themselves. We need to encourage all of those activities in arming ourselves in battle appropriately against these very challenging infections.

To the honourable member's question: There is no data collected on that point, but as I had a chance to say yesterday and in my earlier answer, we're moving forward with a very aggressive regime, which I'll speak about more in my final supplementary.

Ms. Laurie Scott: The outbreak of C. difficile in Quebec caused the loss of life of over 2,000 people. It was a wake-up call to all health ministries across the province. Manitoba and Quebec have implemented new reporting systems. In 2004, the Canadian Medical Association recommended that each province develop a plan for the reporting and tracking of C. difficile cases so that outbreaks can be managed and controlled.

I know that Joseph Brant hospital has been asking and applying for five years for dollars for renewal and reconstruction, and part of that is to deal with the new standards for infectious disease standards that are out there.

Given that this is Emergency Preparedness Week, why has nothing been done since 2004 to bring in reporting requirements with respect to C. difficile and a plan to track and monitor these outbreaks? Dr. Michael Baker in your ministry stated: "The public have a right to know what we do. We have no reason to keep information like

that from the public." What have you been waiting for, Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, the honourable member's assertion that nothing has been done is, of course, inaccurate: 137 funded positions for people to focus specifically on infectious disease are one parcel of what has been done, and two of these individuals are working in the very hospital that the honourable member speaks about today.

Most certainly there is a growing body of awareness about the opportunities and necessity of enhancing transparency in our public health care system, not just about the presence of C. difficile but about a range of other things. Those were contained, in part, in Bill 171, which the honourable member voted against in this very same Legislature about a year ago. Working with our partners at the Ontario Hospital Association, we intend to come forward very soon with a very, very rigorous reporting mechanism that will, in some senses, challenge the public, because it will provide greater transparency about some of those challenges which occur. But we know it's the right thing to do and it will dramatically aid patient safety.

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PLANT CLOSURES

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a question to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, I introduced a bill to expand the safety net for laid-off workers by ensuring that those workers would be eligible for severance pay when their factories, mills or operations close. Yesterday, members of the McGuinty government borrowed a page from Stéphane Dion, sat on their hands and refused to vote on the bill. My question is this: Why won't members of the McGuinty government stand up for workers already hard-hit by the recession? Why are you afraid to take a stand in favour of workers who are struggling in a difficult economy?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to begin by saying that this government takes our responsibilities when it comes to protecting workers very seriously. If the leader of the third party thinks we'd be so irresponsible as to support something without reading it, he is dead wrong. We take our responsibilities when it comes to workers across this province very seriously; when it comes to ensuring that whatever we do, the impacts of what we do on the economy are known. We take our responsibilities to ensure that everything we do in this place helps us to generate jobs in this province; not doing things that could do the opposite and kill jobs, hurting the very people across this province, the workers of this province, whom we're trying to help.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government says they're helping workers, when over 200,000 manufacturing workers are out of a job, and in northern Ontario, direct and indirect, 40,000 people are out of forest sector jobs.

The fact of the matter is that members of the McGuinty government have consistently opposed any measures that would help laid-off workers. My colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Paul Miller, brought Bill 6, which would ensure that workers get their severance pay and their vacation pay. McGuinty government members blocked that. We brought forward a bill to ensure that the most vulnerable workers could join a union by signing a union card. McGuinty government members opposed that. Yesterday, the Stéphane Dion manoeuvre: Sit on your hands and refuse to vote.

Why is the McGuinty government so opposed to any measures that would help laid-off workers even get decent severance pay?

Hon. Brad Duguid: My question would be, why would the NDP be opposed to a $1.5-billion investment in retraining and training of the workers across this province? Why would you be opposed to that? That's what workers need.

Look, when a worker loses their job, we all feel it. We understand the impact it has on the worker; we understand the impact it has on the worker's family. That's why we are indeed investing $1.5 billion in training, so we can help that worker who has the unfortunate circumstance of losing their job get back up on their feet, find another job, get the training they need to find that job. That's where our priority lies. It's something we're very proud of and something that's going to help workers right across this province.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Over 200,000 workers out of their jobs, and the McGuinty government is proud that 10% of them are going to get retraining. What happens to the other 80%? Obviously, the McGuinty government doesn't care.

The example I gave yesterday: Workers, some of whom have worked for 20 years, 25 years, at a facility—it's taken over by an American company. The American company gets the patents, the technology and the order books. The workers, some of whom have worked 25 years, are out on the street, without even severance pay. And what's the response of McGuinty government members? They sit down, refuse to vote, refuse to stand up for those workers.

I ask again, what do you have against workers who've worked for 25 years, who've basically given their working life—why are you opposed to them getting severance pay when they're put out the door?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Maybe the leader of the third party doesn't know this, but he should, because he served in government in this place at one point in time. Ontario is the only province with statutory severance pay obligations for businesses in the entire country. We're the only one in the entire country that provides statutory obligations when it comes to severance pay. No other province across Canada requires employers to provide this statutory severance pay protection.

I don't know why the member would be coming forward with these kinds of suggestions. He talked about

his payroll tax proposal in the previous question. The leader of the third party has to realize that this is a tough economic time that we're going through. Our thoughts are with those workers who may be losing their jobs. At the same time, we're moving forward with a five-point plan to ensure that those workers receive the protection they—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton: I guess the McGuinty government's answer is, these are tough economic times and workers are on their own.

But to the Deputy Premier, my question concerns what is happening in our nursing homes. Last Wednesday, Wally Baker, a Toronto nursing home resident, died after a fall from an automated lift. Three days earlier, another nursing home resident, 87-year-old Florence Rose Coxon, was strangled by the restraining belt that kept her in her wheelchair. This morning, the Ontario Health Coalition released a report showing that even with investments in long-term care, resident needs are not being met.

My question is, when will the McGuinty government realize that residents in long-term-care homes and nursing homes deserve a minimum standard of three and a half hours of personal care per day?

Hon. George Smitherman: First off, I do want to express, with respect to the incident and the death the honourable member mentions, just a couple of points that I think are important. Firstly, the coroner's office is investigating each of those circumstances, and the conclusions that the honourable member has drawn could prove to be correct, but they've not been substantiated by fact through those investigations, and I do think that's important.

On the matter at hand, everybody in this House agrees that with respect to long-term care, our priority must be continuing to put more bodies at the bedside, to drive more resources into the long-term-care sector and to enhance our capacity to support people. That's exactly what our government's strategy has been all along. I was pleased to see that the honourable member has acknowledged the investment that we've made in long-term care, acknowledged that there has been some progress. In supplementary, I'll tell the honourable member about the investments we have made.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The minister refers to a coroner's investigation, and there will be a coroner's investigation, but there have already been coroners' investigations into nursing home situations. In 2005, the Casa Verde inquest handed the McGuinty government no less than 85 recommendations to improve the conditions in Ontario's long-term-care homes. In particular, the McGuinty government was told that a minimum standard of care was imperative, yet the McGuinty government continues to stall, and today there is still no minimum standard of care in nursing homes like this one, where two seniors have now died.

Instead of telling residents in long-term-care facilities to wait, why doesn't the McGuinty government commit to a minimum standard of care today, as the Casa Verde inquest recommended three years ago?

Hon. George Smitherman: First off, it's not fully appropriate for the honourable member to say that those standards aren't in place. We have initiated regulations that, as an example, established the necessity of 24/7 RN coverage in all long-term-care homes and reinstated the principle of at least two baths per week to enhance the quality of care for those residents.

On the matter of the standards, Shirlee Sharkey, quite a well-known and respected figure in health care, will very soon produce a report that will guide the implementation of those standards. We've been focusing on making investments that have brought, to date, about 5,000 additional workers into the long-term-care environment. In this fiscal year, we have 1,200 RPN positions that are being implemented, and more than 800 additional personal support workers will be added to the long-term-care environment, enhancing the ratios of care for our loved ones. When that honourable member was in government, they had a minimum standard of 2.25 hours. Even the health coalition today acknowledged that we're at a much higher standard already.

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Mr. Howard Hampton: What the health coalition and the Ontario Nurses' Association point out is that the minister stands up and says, "Oh, we put some money into long-term care," and when you look at the other end, the care still isn't being provided. Maybe that money is being used to wipe out a nursing home's deficit; perhaps it's being used to take care of some of their WSIB difficulties; but in fact the level of care is not improving.

Meanwhile, workers, families and experts agree that our loved ones in long-term-care homes and nursing homes deserve a guaranteed minimum standard of three and a half hours of hands-on care per day. They're all in agreement. They've been in agreement for some time. Why does the McGuinty government continue to deny three and a half hours of hands-on personal care in our nursing homes and our homes for the aged when seniors are dying in our nursing homes and homes for the aged and people who work there and, in many cases, family members say—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's very, very disappointing that on a morning when the same health coalition is in the building and makes a presentation, the honourable member says differently than they did. They did acknowledge that the investments have resulted in more people working in long-term care. They've actually corroborated the numbers that we've been using. They encourage greater investment as well.

On the matter of greater investment: Number one, we have a minimum standard coming forward. It will be informed by the work of Shirlee Sharkey. Number two:

There have been enhancements in the ratios of care. At present, it's 2.94, and over the course of this fiscal year, it will be increased to at least three hours' minimum average standard of paid care in long-term-care-home environments. Through the course of our mandate, we'll increase that number to 3.25 hours. That will be a total of 20 million annual additional hours of care for our loved ones in long-term care.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is also for the Minister of Health. Today we have indeed heard, very sadly, of yet another death in a long-term-care facility. Minister, you promised a revolution in long-term care. Why is it, then, that Bill 140, the long-term-care bill, passed a year ago, has not been fully enacted by this government?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member. It's a little bit late in the game for that party to show interest in the residents in long-term care. They didn't demonstrate very much of it while they had the opportunity in government. There was a standard when that party came to office of 2.25 hours, and they eliminated the standard. There was a standard, and they eliminated it. Then we brought forward a bill, Bill 140, which the current Minister of Revenue worked very substantially on, and we're working through the regulatory processes to enhance all of the impacts of that bill. One element of that is the minimum standards that I spoke to in my earlier answer. I'm glad to see now that the Conservatives will be supporting initiatives to enhance the quality of care in long-term care. They did precious little of it when they were in government.

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's their bill. Bill 140 was touted by this government as the long-awaited solution to the crisis in long-term care, but long-term-care facilities and the families of the patients in those facilities continue to raise serious concerns about the level of care, the hours of care, the resources available to provide the care needed.

Minister, this House and those people need your revolution and they need it now. When are you going to fully implement Bill 140? What are you waiting for?

Hon. George Smitherman: We haven't waited at all for the regulatory elements of a bill to be fully implemented. Since we first arrived here as a government, we've been investing in long-term care.

That's why, even before this honourable member was elected in this Legislature, our government had added nearly 5,000 additional workers in the long-term-care-home environment. That's why, in this very fiscal year, there are more than 2,000 additional workers being added to the long-term-care-home environment.

If the honourable member wants to stand up and renounce the commitment that his party makes continually about their willingness and desire and plan to cut $3 billion out of health care, there would be some more coherence on the honourable member's part.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Deputy Premier. It's about the poverty consultations. We hear that the poverty minister is now, at the last minute, inviting a few select low-income people to join the group. But the meetings are still not open to the public and they're still being held behind closed doors. Why won't the minister find a way to allow all community members, especially those living in poverty, to bring their experiences directly to her?

Hon. George Smitherman: First off is to acknowledge that there are a wide variety of mechanisms by which any Ontarian can make observations, and we would really encourage them to do so.

The honourable member's assertion that in the work that the minister has done on this she hasn't been meeting with people who are very relevant to poverty or impoverished individuals is something that she's plainly told the honourable member is not the case. You only have to look to the time that she spent in Peterborough and Cobourg to recognize that the minister has been meeting with the very voices and very individuals that we seek to add some substantial benefit to.

Interjection.

Hon. George Smitherman: As the honourable member continues to say, "Not meeting with anyone that was poor," at the same time, the minister had dinner at a youth shelter.

So I think that the honourable member needs to offer a much greater degree of clarity. The minister is out there doing a wide variety of meetings. We encourage people to send us their views as we tackle this substantial challenge.

Mr. Michael Prue: We received this e-mail yesterday from Terrie Meehan, a resident of Ottawa. She wrote:

"I live on ODSP. I am on the steering committee of the ODSP Action Coalition. I am the community member representative on the steering committee of the Alliance to End Homelessness, an organization that did get one of the select invitations.

"Selecting a few people secretly for a round table and/or last-minute meeting without allowing communities adequate time to prepare is not conducive to respecting the community that this process is to serve."

Providing last-minute invitations to community members who have experienced poverty first-hand is simply a slap in the face. When will this government allow full participation, open up these meetings and stop closing the door?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do think that it was interesting that in the honourable member's question he quoted an individual who's from an organization who said that they weren't getting access, and then mentioned that they were. The point of the matter is that the minister is engaging across the breadth of the province of Ontario in a widespread consultation that will bring her the viewpoints of representation from literally dozens and dozens

of groups established for the very purpose of their advocacy on these issues.

Beyond that, there are a wide variety of mechanisms by which individuals can make their views known, including through all members of the Legislature, who have, in this very, very exciting forum, the opportunity to present those views. The minister is working hard. She's in touch and working to meet with dozens and dozens of groups across the province of Ontario. Other members of the committee and MPPs will be doing the same. I'm very, very confident that this debate and discussion will enhance our capacity to address this challenging problem.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I hate to call a point of order in question period, but the Minister of Health, the Deputy Premier, continuously states facts in this House representing the positions of the official opposition. They are completely untrue. I will be following up with a letter. He should be apologizing, withdrawing and committing to never raising these kinds of issues again in this place.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That's not a point of order. I look forward to receiving this letter. I will review the letter.

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to address the statement that I heard the Minister of Health make.

Interjections.

Mr. Frank Klees: It is a point of order because, unless I'm mistaken, the last time I looked at our standing orders, the Speaker is to remind any member in this place that if they are intentionally misleading the House, that is out of order.

I would ask you, Speaker, to rule on this, as to whether or not a minister of the crown who makes a statement that the official opposition has as its policy to cut $3 billion from health care—and, if that is not the case, whether or not that is intentionally misleading the House. I would ask you to rule on that, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I look forward to the letter that will be arriving from the Leader of the Opposition. I will review the Hansard and will make judgment at that time.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I know that members would not want to say indirectly what they've said directly. If we're going to have a situation where points of order are used in effect to engage in rebuttals, then we're going to spend question period on points of order. Mr. Speaker, I'll leave it to you as to whether or not you want to continue hearing points of order that are not points of order.

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PHARMACEUTICAL RESEARCH

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. The International Consortium on Anti-Virals is a not-for-profit drug development organization dedicated to the discovery and development of anti-viral therapies for neglected and emerging diseases, and is also committed to ensuring accessibility to all those in need.

ICAV is currently developing therapies for a variety of diseases such as avian influenza, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, dengue fever, Lassa fever, yellow fever, Ebola and Marburg. ICAV's goal is to deliver one drug to the market every five years that is affordable, effective and accessible.

On February 14, I was pleased to join ICAV's CEO, Jeremy Carver, and Trent University president, Bonnie Patterson, at ICAV's international headquarters, located at Trent University in my riding, to announce $2 million in funding from our government. Minister, can you outline the importance of this funding?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to share with the House that some three million to five million people around the world suffer from influenza, severe illness, and it's estimated that some 250,000 to 500,000 people around the world die from influenza.

There's an amazing coalition that has been built at Trent University in Peterborough with the International Consortium on Anti-Virals. I was pleased to provide, from our ministry, some $2 million, which matches a contribution by the federal government of some $2 million, because of the tremendous nature, the global opportunity that presents itself for Ontario researchers to be at the leading edge of dealing with this global challenge. As I said, some half a million people in the world die every year from influenza, and when we look at SARS, HIV/AIDS, all of these types of viral illnesses, we need to be prepared for that.

BMO Nesbitt Burns says there could be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Through the international collaboration of scientists, governments and industry, ICAV is accelerating the discovery and development of anti-viral therapies—to think that our research capacity and capability in Ontario allows us to complete and partner with not just other provinces but other countries in the world to achieve these successes.

Can the minister outline what our government is doing to strengthen and create international partnerships through ICAV?

Hon. John Wilkinson: Ontario is quickly becoming known around the world as a place where we have this spirit of collaboration, not only within our own province but with international researchers around the world. I would say to the member, just the other day we had the announcement of the International Cancer Genome Consortium, and the fact that we are the world headquarters, right here in our province's capital city.

But I want to particularly talk about the announcement in Peterborough. Trent University is a medium-sized university, but it's punching well above its weight when it comes to internationally recognized research. I want to commend Dr. Michelle Chrétien and Dr. Jeremy Carver for their globally significant research, their leadership,

that is allowing our province to play an amazing role in seizing this global opportunity. As I said, it is a global challenge, and our ability as a province, using research and innovation to address a global challenge, will have—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Madam Minister, I beg you to reconsider an amendment to Bill 12, to permit severely abused adopted children a right to retain their privacy on reaching the age of 19.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member for his concern and his question. But again, I want to reiterate that Bill 12 gives the protection that this member is asking for. If the bill is passed, the individual will be able to apply for a copy of their adoption order and birth registration, and they will be able to register a disclosure veto in cases where the adoption—after September 2008. In addition, the proposed legislation provides that the birth parent or adopted adult—because we're not talking about children; we're talking about adults here—who chooses to register a disclosure veto could voluntarily provide information and that all adopted adults and birth parents can still register a no-contact notice—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: A no-contact order does not prevent a father from stalking a daughter. Madam Minister, in balancing the rights, you have gone in favour of giving a rapist father a right in law to know the adoptive name of his daughter rather than giving that daughter the right to retain her privacy on reaching the age of 19. Is that a correct balance of rights between a perpetrator of crime and a victim?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: In the case that the member is citing, there are other measures in the Criminal Code that this person would be entitled to take to protect herself or himself.

What the member is asking has been rejected by all other provinces in Canada. The member of the other side has been canvassing all sorts of organizations to come to us, and do you know what these organizations are telling us? They're telling us: "[I]t is our view that the determination of abuse"—this is coming from Defence for Children International–Canada. "[I]t is our view that the determination of abuse mechanism is not necessary. Furthermore, we support swift passage of Bill 12"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Six months ago, on November 8, 2007, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses and women across this province came to Queen's Park to demand a commitment from the McGuinty government to step it up on women's issues. Sadly, this government still remains inactive on all of their demands. For example, Nellie's—one of the first shelters in Ontario—doesn't have enough money to stay open. Like other violence-against-women shelters, Nellie's is faced with a growing gap between funding received from the government and the actual costs required to run its services and programs. So I'm asking: When will this government step it up? When will you fund Nellie's so it doesn't have to close? When will you prevent sexual assault against women?

Hon. George Smitherman: I noted from the honourable member's question that she would leave the impression with people that there have been no steps taken in this very important matter of public policy, but that's not the full picture. Indeed, the domestic violence action plan contributed $82 million to a wide variety of initiatives to help intervene earlier, identify women and children at risk sooner and to provide better community supports. There were training sessions that involved 6,000 professionals; there was substantial expansion of the domestic violence court program to 54 jurisdictions; public campaigns initiated in communities; new shelter beds opened—a very substantial number—since 2003; and funding for an assaulted women's helpline that has helped to address challenges.

I could acknowledge that there are, I'm very certain, unmet needs, and opportunities where we can further expand and enhance programming, but there has been a very substantial investment—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is Sexual Assault Prevention Month, and Nellie's has been asking you for funding since 2004. They currently turn away five women every day. They're filled to capacity and their doors are going to close unless you step it up and help them with funding.

So I'm going to ask again. The question is very simple: Are you going to step it up and help them with funding or not?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say to the honourable member that our investments since 2003 have gone up by 20%, to about $190 million. The honourable member is raising a very particular circumstance that I will take under advisement. I'm not as familiar with the direct funding relationship of that one organization. I'm familiar with the work that they do and the necessity of that work and the support and role that it plays here in the city of Toronto. As I've said, I'll take that under advisement, work with the honourable member and endeavour to get back to the honourable member with the answer.

1130

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. As you know, my

riding is home to the University of Guelph. The university's history dates back to 1874 when the Ontario School of Agriculture was established on a farm originally provided by the provincial government.

Since 1964, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has had a unique agreement where the ministry provides transfer payments that allow the university to offer diploma programs in agriculture and related disciplines and to manage extensive research programs in support of Ontario's agriculture, food and related industries. This formal agreement with the university has delivered results, including such innovations as the development of omega 3 eggs. Could the minister please tell this House about some of the accomplishments this partner has provided to the ministry—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: This is a very important issue, particularly for—well, for everyone in Ontario, because we all enjoy the quality products that come from Ontario farmers.

What I can say is, yes, our government is committed to partnerships and committed to innovation. That is why the provincial government has, over the last number of years, provided $54 million to the University of Guelph. What has that $54 million gotten us? It has leveraged more than $1 billion a year in returns. As a result of that, we can say that the agri-food industry is the second-largest economic driver in Ontario. It delivers $30 billion a year to the provincial economy. We believe that by continuing to make investments, as we have, in partnership with the University of Guelph, focusing on innovation, that will continue to build the strength of the agriculture industry in the province of Ontario.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Indeed, the University of Guelph-OMAFRA partnership is at the heart of the Guelph agri-food economic cluster. It's made up of 60 agricultural, technology and biological companies and 24 research facilities, contributing 6,000 jobs. These jobs represent 10% of Guelph's workforce.

In the 2008 budget, our government announced $56 million in additional funding to the University of Guelph. Just last week, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs announced a renewed 10-year agreement with the university which will carry with it $300 million over the next five years. Could the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs please tell this House what this new agreement will mean to the university, the agri-food sector and the people of Ontario?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I was delighted that the honourable member was able to join me at the University of Guelph with dozens and dozens of industry stakeholders, dozens of representatives from the University of Guelph and also representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I thought it was an excellent demonstration of how all three groups came together and recognized why we needed to have a partnership.

I also think it demonstrated this government's commitment to the agriculture sector, because in addition to the new $56 million for research that was in the budget, we were able to sign an agreement, a commitment of $300 million over the next five years, with the University of Guelph. They will be working with agriculture partners in the industry on innovation that will enable the industry to better compete in the global marketplace. We know there are particular pressures—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

COAL-FIRED GENERATING STATIONS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Your Premier has stated repeatedly that coal is bad and he would get rid of it in Ontario. In fact, he has claimed that the use of coal has led to 667 death a year in Ontario. Deputy Premier, I ask how he justifies the financing of the conversion of blast furnaces at Dofasco steel from natural gas and oil to—listen carefully—pulverized coal? How do you square this with the people of Ontario? How do you square that hypocrisy?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw "hypocrisy." How do you square such duplicity?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw.

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: The member is absolutely right: We are determined to eliminate the use of coal in electricity generation in the province of Ontario. We've already made some very strong steps forward in that. We are committed in the year 2014 to completely eliminate any production of electricity through coal.

All members may not be aware of this, and the public may not be aware of it, but in the year 2011, we're determined to cut the use of coal by another third. We cut it by a third in 2006, we'll cut it by another third in 2011, and we will completely eliminate it by 2014.

There's no question that we're taking a leadership role in North America on this. We are dedicated and determined to eliminate the use of coal in electricity generation in the province of Ontario, and we'll do that, and we'll hit our next target in 2011 and completely eliminate it in 2014.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Liberal principles are like the weather: variable. They change very quickly. It's clear that the only thing that matters to this government is politics. Principles mean nothing whatsoever. If they see coal as bad politics, they dump it. If they see it as good politics at Dofasco, they burn it. Minister, would you simply admit to this House and to the people of Ontario that when it comes to your principles regarding coal, they were pulverized into dust long ago?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I think what the public is interested in is a determined plan to eliminate the use of coal. I appreciate that he had written down that cute little saying there, but just for the public we are speaking to,

I'm very proud to say that in the next 18 months we'll have more new generation coming on stream, electricity generation, than in any 18-month period in the history of the province. That will allow us to proceed to our next one-third reduction in coal in 2011 and to completely eliminate it in 2014.

I'll just say to the public, in spite of the language you may hear, that we are leading North America in the elimination of coal-fired production of electricity. I'm very proud of that. Our plan, which we are proceeding with aggressively, will allow us to do that. I think the public should feel confident that in 2014, we will be completely out of the use of coal.

CONTRÔLE DES MALADIES INFECTIEUSES

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

M^me^ France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Les Ontariens et Ontariennes viennent d'apprendre que 76 patients à un hôpital de Burlington sont décédés à la suite d'une infection clostridium difficile durant une période de 20 mois. Pendant des années, les néo-démocrates ont demandé au gouvernement que le bureau de l'Ombudsman puisse recevoir les plaintes des hôpitaux, mais les libéraux ont refusé.

Combien d'autres crises de ce genre est-ce que les Ontariens devront endurer avant que le ministre de la Santé oblige les hôpitaux à démontrer plus de transparence et d'imputabilité ?

Hon. George Smitherman: Merci beaucoup. I want to thank the honourable member for the question. As I had a chance to say in the earlier answer, the challenges associated with C. difficile have been extraordinarily well known, but obviously the transparency associated with the investigation at Jo Brant hospital has proved very, very startling evidence.

As I had a chance to say, we're moving forward with a regime that builds on earlier actions that we've taken to enhance the number of people who work in the area of infection and trying to curtail the spread of infection in the hospital environment with mandatory reporting, which will dramatically enhance the transparency for Ontarians. That will be only one measure that we will be adding to a much more transparent model that we think can help to drive outcomes and enhance patient safety.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I don't think the minister quite understood my question. I'm going to try again.

On a daily basis, my office hears from Ontarians who want our hospitals to be held accountable for their actions. They're asking our hospitals to be more transparent. When disease outbreaks occur, infection rates should be made readily available to the public. Even though the minister promised public reporting would be in place by April 1, this has not happened. Instead of telling Ontarians that maybe next year public reporting will be improved, why doesn't the minister agree to an Ombudsman oversight of our hospitals today?

1140

Hon. George Smitherman: I very much agree with part of the thrust of the honourable member's question related to transparency, and that's why, as I've had a chance to say three or four times already in this House this morning, we're working with the Ontario Hospital Association on bringing in a regime that would implement mandatory public reporting of hospital-acquired infections.

We do believe fundamentally that transparency is crucial. Just as an example, in recent months we had new information about mortality rates in hospitals. That presents challenging information, but at the same time, a very strong impetus on the part of those who run the hospitals to achieve better outcomes. That's why I appreciate very much the honourable member's encouragement and support for the implementation of mandatory reporting, and I look forward to an opportunity soon to better inform Ontarians and the members of the House about the exact details and implementation dates.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Ontario has a wealth of individuals with the skill and the drive to shape their own economic success by starting their own businesses. Small and medium-sized businesses in my riding of Willowdale tell me that in today's global economy it is crucial for them to explore opportunities all over the globe. Helping companies connect to the global economy helps to solidify Ontario's reputation as an international leader.

Will the minister tell us what his ministry is doing to help Ontario's small and medium-sized entrepreneurs grow to the next level of success in the global economy?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I really want to thank my colleague from Willowdale for asking this question. I also want to thank him for his support and advocacy on behalf of small businesses.

I am very proud of our small business community. They add enormously to the prosperity of our province. Almost $230-billion worth of activity is generated by small business, and 99% of all businesses in Ontario are small. They create more than 50% of all employment in this province. That's why it is important for us to make sure that the innovative products and services they provide are showcased in the world markets.

In our last budget, we provided $5 million—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Answer.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: —we put aside and gave it to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce so that they can take their products globally and they can highlight the kind of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: In my riding of Willowdale, many small business owners are planning to retire over the next few years. Many of these business owners plan

to transfer or sell their businesses to a family member, mostly to their children. Youth are the entrepreneurs of the future. We need to equip Ontario's youth with the business skills to ensure that these family-owned businesses continue to grow to the next level of success in the global economy.

Would the minister tell us how his ministry is providing Ontario's youth with the knowledge and skills it takes to be successful in the global marketplace, so that these family-owned small businesses can continue to succeed in the global economy?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member again for asking this question. It's really important for us to create a culture of entrepreneurship in this province, especially among our youth, so we have a couple of programs at the secondary school level. We have a business plan competition that encourages youth to get involved in entrepreneurship activities. We also have a very successful summer company program and we are accepting applications for that program right now.

In addition to that, last year we started a global education program that provides our youth the opportunity to work with multinationals, not just in Canada but abroad as well, so they can acquire the skills needed to be successful in managing the transition in the family business and create a culture of entrepreneurship in this province.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. A month ago you and I met with resort owners who are losing thousands of dollars in reservations and are not hiring summer students due to your red tape and your pan fish regulations. On that day, you made a 48-hour commitment to resolve this problem. Obviously you care more about fish than people. The problem is still there. Minister, who is driving the MNR ship—you or your unseen bureaucracy? Why have you not acted?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: To the member: He's absolutely right. As the Minister of Natural Resources, the fish do make a difference to me. Part of my responsibility is to look after the natural resources of this province.

As a matter of fact, we did meet, and I did indicate that I would be in touch. I was, virtually the next day, in touch with the individual and said that that I would put my staff to work on finding a way to resolve this issue. There are questions because we have a council that is up and going in an adjacent area and an imposed limit in another. I'm trying to find a way to deal with the issue of pan fish that's fair and equitable. I spoke, as a matter of fact, to the individual yesterday. I've had some—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Minister, you told resort owners that the pan fish limits are not needed for conservation, that they were made without consultation and they are not based on science. Now you're finding a way to slough it off to another zone. Our economy lags, our American tourists are spending money elsewhere, and students are getting pink slips. Minister, your answer reminds me a little bit of a slippery, slimy fish tail I once tried to grab a hold of, and you seem to be in over your head. Is it your lack of respect for your commitments and to the people of Ontario? Is this due to your incompetence, uncaring or just another Liberal—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: As I said to the member, he doesn't need to shout and huff and puff. We actually are sitting down, working to try to find a resolution to what is a very difficult situation, trying to find a way that's fair and equitable dealing with both jurisdictions. I have been in constant contact. I've had some 15 to 20 different e-mails. I've had telephone conversations. I recognize that the same challenges we face here are the reason why those folks who come from the United States come here: because their states have imposed 50-fish limits for the same commercialization reason. We're trying to work to find a resolution and we will find a resolution, but I want one that is sustainable, that deals not only with looking at the economy, the fish, which is the environment, and also dealing with the societal issues that are there. That's the whole concept of a sustainable solution, and work it through, we will. We—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Transportation; Jim, it's your turn. You'll know that the dump truck industry is under severe cost pressures with high fuel costs and other issues, and you'll know that one of the things they're doing in order to offset those costs is to increase the loads on individual trucks to put them over the legal limit. My question to you is this: What are you going to do to make sure that we enforce the legal limit so that those trucks are not running dangerously on our highways?

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's a very good question, and the member would know, first of all, that they are extremely concerned about the price of fuel because that affects the bottom line for them when they're working. Also, the amount of money they're getting paid by those they contract with has not gone up significantly, if at all, in the last few years. So they're very justifiably concerned about that.

In relation to the other question the member asks, it's a very good question. No one in the province is entitled to have a load which is above the regulations specified by the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation. Police services, particularly the Ontario Provincial Police and other police services in the province, take appropriate action.

I'll listen to his supplementary and provide some more information.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, we all accept that at the end, the ministry has to do its job and ensure that the trucks are not run over those legal limits as far as weight. But the base of the problem is cost. What are you going to do to assist the dump truck industry in order to deal with some of those cost issues so that they can become more viable and not have to run overweight?

1150

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to have the magic solution to costs, and I don't, but about the safety, I think we do.

As you know, the Ministry of Transportation conducts blitzes from time to time. All former ministers here would have been part of those blitzes, where vehicles are pulled over to the side and there's a complete safety check. In the case of weights, they must go into the weigh stations. If they're over at that time, they can be fined. The fine can be up to $20,000. The fine can be applied to the driver, to the truck company itself or to those who are loading. So it's totally unacceptable for anybody to be over the limit. We have officers out there conducting blitzes. We even have some mobile units that are able to go to different parts of the province to do the weighing.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: What are you going to do about the cost issue?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The cost issue is not within the purview of the Minister of Transportation, but perhaps on another day you could direct that to yet another minister in the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Health, in a response to my earlier question, made a statement about the official opposition's support of Bill 171. I just wanted to tell the minister that we did in fact support Bill 171, and I'd ask him to please correct his record.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just remind the member that you can't correct another member's record.

Hon. George Smitherman: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would acknowledge the honourable member's helpful intervention, acknowledge my error and apologize for it.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I note today that we have seven ministers absent from the Legislature. I want the government to know that the opposition is quite agreeable, if the ministers can't get here this early in the morning, to going to a later question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the member that we're not to make references to absences of members.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I need to remind members—and I've offered some leniency this week—that the new standing orders, as written, are clear that introductions of guests needs to be in my hands, in my office, one hour prior to question period, which would mean 9:45 in the morning. I will oblige these introductions that have arrived after that, but next week I will be applying the standing order rules, which say one hour prior to question period.

On behalf of the member from Oakville, in the east members' gallery, we'd like to welcome Charles Mulli, Esther Mulli and Michael Crane, the directors of the Mully Children's Family HIV/AIDS orphanage in Nairobi, Kenya. Welcome today to Queen's Park.

On behalf of the member from Brampton–Springdale, in the west public gallery, we'd also like to welcome the ESL students from Central Peel Secondary School.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and send it to the table with Thomas.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a 10,400-name petition to the Ontario government that goes like this:

"Whereas understaffing in Ontario's nursing homes is a serious problem resulting in inadequate care for residents and unsafe conditions for staff;

"Whereas after the Harris government removed the regulations providing minimum care levels in 1995, hours of care dropped below the previous 2.25 hour/day minimum;

"Whereas the recent improvements in hours of care are not adequate, vary widely and are not held to accountable standards;

"Whereas there is currently nothing in legislation to protect residents and staff from renewed cuts to care levels by future governments; and

"Whereas care needs have measurably increased with aging and the movement of people with more complex health needs from hospitals into long-term-care homes;"

They ask the government to:

"Immediately enact and fund an average care standard of 3.5 hours per resident per day in the regulations under the new Long-Term Care Homes Act."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it through the very strong page Cali.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I will sign this petition and give it to page Vanessa.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank the members of Wasaga Beach United Church for sending me this petition.

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I agree with this petition, and I've signed it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and I'd like to thank the many people who showed up yesterday for the relaunch of the Credit Valley Current for having signed it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Jasdeep to carry it for me.

LORD'S PRAYER

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my name and give it to page Peter.

1200

MARY FIX PARK

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today for the rehabilitation of Mary Fix Park in Mississauga.

"Whereas the province of Ontario has acquired public and private lands for the reconstruction and upgrading of the QEW/Hurontario interchange; and

"Whereas some of the acquired lands will be in excess of the requirements for the interchange; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga has stated that these lands in excess of the interchange requirements have no developmental value; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation and highways has stated that excess lands from this project will be conveyed to the city of Mississauga for parkland; and

"Whereas the Mary Fix Park property was originally donated to the city of Mississauga exclusively for parkland to preserve natural woodland; and

"Whereas this development has caused the loss of century-old trees, natural woodland and wildlife habitat from Mary Fix Park, and has substantially increased noise and traffic to local residences; and

"Whereas the lands on the south and west side of Pinetree Way are no longer the subject of further construction;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, remediate the lands surrounding the south and west areas of Pinetree Way between Hurontario Street and Glenburnie Road by planting trees and constructing berms within this year, and convey all excess lands from the QEW/Hurontario interchange to the city of Mississauga upon completion of the project."

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: Mr. Speaker, with your permission: I'm sure somebody will look at me and see that I'm all sliced up. It was not an accident. I was intentionally sliced at the hospital and re-stitched to remove some cysts. So thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

I do wish to present a petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact on the quality care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I will sign that and pass that to Jack.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: This is a petition from the people on Livingstone Avenue.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at $54 billion; and

"Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets $4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus, unemployed are not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end this discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

I'm in solidarity with Ontario workers and I affix my name to the petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a welcome opportunity to get a second chance for a very important petition for those of us who live in western Mississauga. I'd like to thank Pat Cissell of Meadowvale for having sent it to me. It's addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I thank those who signed the petition. I'm going to sign and support it myself, and ask page Naomi to carry it for me.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: This is the second petition in reference to the Ajax-Pickering hospital.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas ... it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

I will affix my name to that and pass it to Peter.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition in support of Bill 50, the Provincial Animal Welfare Act.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends."

I support this petition, and I affix my name to it.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to present this petition addressed to the Parliament of Ontario. It was sent to me by Marian Galuszka of Mississauga, and it actually speaks in favour of an initiative of my colleague for Newmarket–Aurora. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

I'm pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition and once again to ask page Jasdeep to carry it for me.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for petitions has expired. This House stands recessed until 1 o'clock this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1209 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mrs. Julia Munro: This morning, just in front of Queen's Park, I met with Stefan Marinoiu. Since Sunday, he has been on a hunger strike demanding that this government take action on autism. Stefan is out in front of this building because he has an autistic son and he wants his son to receive the treatment he needs.

Yesterday, to her credit, the Minister of Children and Youth Services came out and met with Stefan. Now it is

up to her to talk to the Premier and the Minister of Finance and find the money to meet the needs of autistic children like Stefan's son.

I asked Mr. Marinoiu twice to give up his hunger strike, but both times he said no. It is not good for his health, but he is out there today because of his love for his son and because the government will not help him.

No one would go on a hunger strike unless they were desperate. Families whose autistic children have been left to linger on waiting lists are desperate. They need your help, and it is time for you to do something.

RAHIMULLAH AND NAZIFA SHAHGHASY

Mr. Kuldip Kular: I rise before my colleagues today in respect of a recent most tragic event that has occurred in my community. On Wednesday of last week, my constituents in Brampton were shocked to learn of the brutal deaths of Rahimullah and Nazifa Shahghasy.

The media has reported that Mr. and Mrs. Shahghasy were simply going about their normal lives when their lives were cut tragically short. What is perhaps less widely known is that this brave couple had years ago left their homeland, Afghanistan, for India, only to be forced again to abandon their home in search of a new life where they could pursue a dream we all share, a dream of a prosperous future for our families. That search brought them here to Canada as refugees.

I knew Rahimullah and Nazifa personally—I was their physician and a friend—and I know that their children, their family, and indeed our entire community is devastated by their deaths. I join in grieving their loss and offer my sincere and heartfelt condolences to their children, their family and all who loved them and were touched by their lives. I'm certain that all members of this House join me in expressing our sympathies for the family. May we keep them in our thoughts and prayers.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to speak for the 52 families who recently learned that their lives are on hold after yet another shutdown in the forestry sector. These families in the great town of Mattawa are left to wonder how many jobs have to be lost before the McGuinty government decides that the economy and forestry in northern Ontario are in trouble.

Unfortunately, this government has made it perfectly clear that they are unwilling to stand up for the forestry sector and the north. Liberal cabinet ministers routinely say things like forestry has "turned the corner," and the province has gotten off "scot-free" from the forestry crisis, but despite these assessments, Mattawa and the north are still struggling.

We simply do not hear from this government anymore when it comes to the forestry sector, nor do we hear from the local member, the Minister of Revenue, when her riding is being hammered by job losses. Last month it was Dyno Nobel in North Bay which, according to the North Bay Nugget, "slashed its workforce, leaving only 14 employees on the payroll." This month it is Tembec, a huge employer in the north, laying 52 people off in Mattawa.

It's time that the local member stood up for her riding and it's time her government took real action to help our forestry and manufacturing sectors. It's clear to everyone but this government that they simply do not have a plan for Ontario's struggling economy. Cut red tape, lower taxes and put in place a real energy plan. That is what Ontarians and families in the north and Mattawa deserve.

NATURAL GAS RATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Energy policy in McGuinty's Ontario is designed to increase profits for energy companies, undermine manufacturing and increase poverty. In April, the McGuinty cabinet backed an Ontario Energy Board decision to deregulate natural gas storage in this province.

According to Michael Janigan, at the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Union Gas consumers are expected to make up the annual revenue credits of $100 million in rates, and Enbridge customers have to pay $40 million more. This money will go to Spectra Energy, in Texas, and will be lost to Ontario's economy.

The amount of loss per Union Gas customer is between $72 and $115 per year. This is a substantial transfer of wealth out of this province—wealth that could be used to improve people's standard of living; money that could be used to invest in energy efficiency.

Instead, because Mike Harris's legacy of deregulation has not been repudiated by the McGuinty government, we are suffering gravely from money going out of this province. It is a mistake to hold on to Mike Harris's policies. It is a direction that was rejected by the people of this province and one that this government should abandon and take up the direction of protecting the people of this province on energy issues.

JAMES FOSTER

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I rise in the House today to pay tribute to an inspirational member of the Brampton fire service. Firefighter James Foster, a member of station 206, will be departing for Vancouver on June 2, on a 7,600-kilometre bike ride ending 19 days later in Halifax. He'll be part of a team of cyclists riding to raise funds to improve the lives of children living with cancer.

Firefighter Foster has seen family members and friends who have been touched by cancer. He says, "If you have even had any exposure to kids with cancer, there is a feeling of utter devastation—so this is something I can do to help." Every dollar raised on this trip goes directly to benefit a child with cancer. The foundation sponsors camps for kids and helps families with renovations that help ease daily living for families living with this devastating diagnosis.

James isn't alone on this tour. His captain, Bill Archdekin, will be using his vacation time to accompany James. Captain Archdekin will be driving a van that has been loaned to them by the Brampton fire service. As well, a parent of a 16-year-old brain cancer survivor will be travelling as a volunteer nurse.

James is grateful for the support of his community, his co-workers at the Brampton fire service, Chief Andy MacDonald and the city of Brampton. James's original goal was to raise $15,000. As of yesterday, he had raised $45,000.

Please join me in congratulating James Foster, an extraordinary Brampton firefighter. We're proud of him, and we wish him well on his ride.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I rise in the House today to question the sincerity of the Liberal government's commitment to Ontarians with disabilities. The government purports to be interested in making Ontario accessible to people with disabilities. The facts tell a much different story.

One example is in my riding, at Hyland Heights Elementary School in Shelburne. Over the years, requests by staff, parents and administration for the installation of a handicapped-accessible door have fallen on unsympathetic ears. This year, a grade eight student will not be able to graduate on the stage with her classmates because the lift that allows her to accept her graduation certificate has been broken for many years and she can't get to the stage. Even after renovations were completed one year ago at Hyland Heights school, no handicapped-accessible doors exist for students or staff.

I call on the government today to examine its priorities regarding physically disabled individuals and stop the meaningless announcements if they won't make a difference at schools such as Hyland Heights Elementary in my riding of Dufferin–Caledon. Action is what is needed, not more meaningless announcements.

YOUNG SINGERS

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise today to draw attention to a very special event that took place in my riding of Ajax–Pickering, on April 24. At Deer Creek Golf Clubs, there was an exciting performance, an evening with Robert Pilon, in support of the Young Singers. One of Canada's most respected and sought-after vocalists, he introduced the Young Singers, Durham region's winning youth choir, to a gala audience.

1310

Young Singers is a dynamic community youth choral program in Durham region. Under the direction of founder Anna Lynn Murphy and accompanist Lois Craig, the artistic creativity in these talented young people has been fostered for the past 16 years as they discover the joy of singing.

Joining them in organizing the event in April were the unsung volunteers of Tracy Patterson, Maureen Dowhaniuk, Katie Cronin-Wood and Cynthia Feltrin.

There are over 120 youth currently singing in the Young Singers program, and these talented singers have performed throughout Ontario and abroad. The Young Singers have taken the stage with Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat with Donny Osmond and Don Harron and the internationally acclaimed North Metro Chorus. They continue to be performing guests with artists like Robert Pilon of Phantom of the Opera and Les Misérables fame, with mutually benefiting reciprocal arrangements.

These young singers will be travelling to Ottawa in May to appear at the national MusicFest and are looking forward to performing at the Young Singers annual spring concert on June 8 at 2 p.m. at Forest Brook Community Church in Ajax on Bayly Street, just prior to Lakeridge Road.

ANNIVERSARY OF ISRAEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: On behalf of Premier McGuinty and my colleagues, I rise for the purpose of recognizing an historic event that took place 60 years ago: the establishment of the state of Israel. It is the fulfillment of prophecies, prayers and dreams. On this festive occasion, we all join in the hopes and prayers of Jewish people here and in Israel that the day may not be far off when the people of Israel and the nations of the world lay down their arms, turn their swords into ploughshares and realize the beautiful word of peace, "shalom."

Israel may be a small dot on the map of the world, but it is a giant model of democracy—indeed, the great symbol. In spite of economic hardship, wars and threats of war, Israel has not lost its sense of purpose: to shine as a beacon of freedom, democracy and fulfillment of the promise of the ancient Hebrew prophets.

I wish to recognize the presence of the diplomatic corps of the state of Israel, including the consul general of Israel, Amir Gissin; Alan Weiner from the UJA of greater Toronto; Dr. Leon Genesoux from B'nai Brith Canada; Frank Bialystok from the Canadian Jewish Congress; and a good friend of Israel, Mr. Charles McVety. We want to welcome them here. As we have raised the Israeli flag outside a few minutes ago, I wish to say to them, shalom and congratulations.

OAK RIDGES MORAINE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: On April 25 of this year, I attended an event hosted by the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust to celebrate its grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The event took place on the Oak Ridges moraine trail where it runs through the beautiful campus of Seneca College in King township in my riding.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust is dedicated to encouraging a greater understanding and awareness of

the natural environment and heritage of the Oak Ridges moraine. It serves to locate significant natural or agricultural land and then works with the landowners to ensure that the land is conserved in perpetuity.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust will receive $155,500 over a three-year period to increase its capacity to improve volunteer resources, fundraising and marketing. These enhancements will support expanded land-securing initiatives across the Oak Ridges moraine.

The moraine is my constituency's defining physical feature, with steep, forested ridges studded with granite boulders left by the glaciers interspersed with deep kettle lakes and wetlands. It is the source of the headwaters of the rivers and streams that flow into both Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe, which provide drinking water to millions of Ontarians.

Protection of the moraine as part of the greenbelt plan will help clean our air and our water and provide green fields to grow our food. I thank our government and the Ontario Trillium Foundation for its foresight in recognizing the importance of the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust to all Ontarians.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COMMUNITY RIGHT TO KNOW ACT (DISCLOSURE OF TOXINS AND POLLUTANTS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE DROIT DU PUBLIC D'ÊTRE INFORMÉ (DIVULGATION DES TOXINES ET DES POLLUANTS)

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 76, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, the Environmental Protection Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act / Projet de loi 76, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur, la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement et la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short introduction.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I will read the explanatory note, Speaker:

"The bill adds a provision to the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 that prohibits prescribed suppliers from supplying a consumer with goods or services that expose the consumer to certain toxic chemicals unless the supplier has first warned the consumer of the possible exposure. It is an offence under the act to contravene the provision.

"The bill amends the Environmental Protection Act to require the Minister of the Environment to establish a pollutant inventory containing a variety of information relating to the release of pollutants into the environment and the environmental and health effects of such pollutants.

"The bill amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to require employers to provide to the local fire department all material safety data sheets required by part IV of the act and to maintain an inventory of all hazardous materials in the workplace. In addition, the bill prohibits the use of hazardous materials in a workplace where it is reasonably practicable to substitute a material that is not hazardous."

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROVINCIAL PARKS AND MAJOR PROVINCIAL TOURIST ATTRACTIONS SIGN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR L'ÉRECTION DE PANNEAUX DANS LES PARCS PROVINCIAUX ET À L'EMPLACEMENT D'IMPORTANTES ATTRACTIONS TOURISTIQUES PROVINCIALES

Mr. Lalonde moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to require bilingual signs in provincial parks, parks under the control of the Niagara Parks Commission and at major provincial tourist attractions / Projet de loi 21, Loi exigeant l'érection de panneaux bilingues dans les parcs provinciaux, dans les parcs sous le contrôle de la Commission des parcs du Niagara et à l'emplacement d'importantes attractions touristiques provinciales.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Lalonde.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Je suis très fier de débattre ce projet de loi aujourd'hui, car je crois que c'est un geste de courtoisie vis-à-vis des francophones qui viennent visiter notre belle province.

I am delighted to debate this bill today because I believe that this is a simple way to be courteous to the francophone tourists who come and visit our beautiful province. As I mentioned when introducing this bill, I was inspired to do so when, in 2006, a delegation of francophone parliamentarians from all corners of the globe came to participate in a meeting of l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie here at Queen's Park. While they were here in Ontario, they visited Niagara Falls, one of the seven wonders of the world. They were amazed that the tourism signs in Niagara Falls were in English only. Quite frankly, so was I.

Le tourisme est une partie importante de l'économie de l'Ontario. L'année dernière, l'industrie a employé plus de 185 000 travailleurs à travers la province, représentant 2,8 % du total des emplois de l'Ontario. Entre 2006 et 2007, les emplois dans le secteur du tourisme en Ontario ont augmenté par 9 %, comparé à seulement 5,2 % dans le reste du Canada.

Tourism is an important component of Ontario's economy. Last year, tourism employed 185,000 workers across the province, representing 2.8% of total employment in Ontario. From 2006 to 2007, employment in Ontario's tourism sector rose by 9%, compared to only 5.2% in the rest of Canada. Tourism is Ontario's seventh-largest generator of foreign exchange.

Direct entries of visitors to Ontario from overseas countries increased by 4% in January 2008 over the same period in 2007. In 2008, research shows a decline in US travel to Ontario by 8.6%, while overseas travel will be down by just 1.6%. We need to take this opportunity to share Ontario's culture with the world. In 2008, overseas entries to Ontario and Quebec are growing faster than in the rest of Canada. This is why something had to be done to continue to attract tourists to Ontario.

Tourism contributed more than $20.4 billion to the province's GDP in 2004. For every dollar spent by tourists in Ontario in 2004, the three levels of government received 27 cents in direct tax revenue. That is for every dollar spent by tourists in Ontario. The federal government received 14.9 cents, the provincial government received 11.2 cents, and municipal government received one cent.

La contribution totale du tourisme aux recettes fiscales des trois niveaux de gouvernement s'est élevée à 9,2 $ milliards en 2004.

Yes, tourism's total contribution to tax revenues for all three levels of government amounted to $9.2 billion in 2004. Clearly, tourism is a very important source of revenue for this province.

Given that a great deal of our tourists come from overseas and from the rest of Canada, why not show simple courtesy to the francophones among them by gradually replacing our signs in provincial parks in both official languages?

En 2006, la France à elle seule—je dis bien la France à elle seule—comptait 130 000 visites à notre belle province, représentant 17 % des visites totales des étrangers cette année-là. De plus, pendant les deux dernières années, 1,8 million de résidents de la province de Québec ont pris des vacances, dont 54,8 % ont visité l'Ontario. Il faut augmenter ce pourcentage.

France alone accounted for 130,000 visits to our great province in 2006, representing 17% of total overseas visits that year. Furthermore, during the past two years, residents of the province of Quebec took 1.8 million pleasure trips, and 54.8% of them visited Ontario. In a bilingual country such as ours, we should encourage francophones to visit our beautiful province and welcome these tourists by providing French signage in provincial parks and tourist attractions.

Je suggère donc que ce serait la moindre des choses que de rendre nos affiches touristiques bilingues dans tous nos parcs provinciaux afin de bien accueillir nos touristes francophones qui nous rendent visite d'année en année, et surtout que ça ne coûte aucuns frais additionnels à la province, puisque je propose que ces affiches deviennent bilingues seulement au moment nécessaire de les remplacer ou lors d'une nouvelle installation.

This initiative will cost the province no extra money, as I propose that signs become bilingual if and only when it is necessary or practical to do so. This bill proposes that existing English signs be replaced by bilingual ones in provincial parks, parks under the control of the Niagara Parks Commission and other prescribed provincial tourist attractions in Ontario as it becomes necessary to replace them.

Comme décrit dans le projet de loi, le projet a pour objet de faire remplacer les panneaux unilingues, au fur et à mesure qu'il devienne nécessaire de le faire, par des panneaux bilingues dans les parcs provinciaux, dans les parcs sous le contrôle de la Commission des parcs du Niagara, et à l'emplacement d'autres attractions touristiques provinciales prescrites en Ontario. Je ne peux imaginer une meilleure façon de souhaiter la bienvenue à nos touristes francophones lors de leur séjour parmi nous.

I can't imagine a better way to welcome the francophone tourists who come to visit our great province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Just to remind members, under the new rules, each party has up to 12 minutes to participate in the debate.

Debate? The honourable member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I will be sharing my time with the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

I'm pleased to rise to participate in the debate on Bill 21, An Act to require bilingual signs in provincial parks, parks under the control of the Niagara Parks Commission and at major provincial tourist attractions.

Je me lève aujourd'hui pour faire quelques commentaires au sujet du projet de loi 21 introduit par mon ami de la circonscription de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. Ce projet de loi est très simple et entièrement normal, à mon avis. C'est essentiellement un effort d'adresser l'utilisation de la langue française dans certains parcs provinciaux et dans ou près de nos attractions touristiques majeures en Ontario. Je serai totalement « supportive » de ce projet de loi. En fait, notre caucus progressiste-conservateur le soutiendra.

Il me semble que chaque membre de cette Chambre peut et doit le supporter actuellement. Pour moi, c'était une surprise quand j'ai reçu l'information en dedans. C'est une idée gratuite pour les citoyens et extrêmement facile à adopter.

I rise today to talk about the private member's bill introduced by the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Bill 21, the Provincial Parks and Major Provincial Tourist Attractions Sign Act. I will be supporting this bill, as I've said in French. In fact, the entire Progressive Conservative caucus will be supporting this

bill. Why not? I would be very surprised if every member in this House didn't rise to show their support for a bill such as this. This bill requires that signs be bilingual in all provincial parks, parks under the control of the Niagara Parks Commission, and provincial tourist attractions generally, major ones. It also allows parks to phase in the change in signage so the change will happen during the normal maintenance of the signs, which means simply that there is no cost to the citizens of Ontario.

I have to ask myself this question: Why is the Legislature talking about a bill like this in the first place? We are here to deal with the major business of Ontarians. A bill like this is so straightforward and so simple that it should already have happened. Yet day after day we are here representing the people of Ontario, but we are not dealing with the issues that Ontarians care about the most.

We have talked about Bill 11, for example, which bans smoking in cars with kids in them. The nanny state mentality of this government has been to legislate that morons can't be morons. We are talking about Bill 12, which is designed to fix the problems created the first time the government stuck its nose into adoption records. Bill 12 fails to properly address those issues. There is Bill 35, which legitimizes the end-of-year slush funds that the Premier has become so fond of. There is Bill 50, which undermines many local humane societies. Of course, there is Bill 55, which legislated the splitting of TFO from TVO, which of course already happened a year ago.

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On top of that, the government is now debating in the public forum whether the Lord's Prayer should be said in the House, and I bet that 99% of Ontarians didn't know or care about that before the Premier played politics with that issue.

Nous passons beaucoup de temps à parler des problèmes qui ont très peu d'importance pour la plupart des Ontariens. Le gouvernement ne parle pas du seul problème qui fait la plus grande inquiétude pour pratiquement tous les Ontariens, et ce problème est l'économie. Quand les économies de la Colombie-Britannique, de l'Alberta, de la Saskatchewan, du Québec, de la Nouvelle-Écosse et de Terre-Neuve expérimentent tous la croissance étendue, le gouvernement McGuinty n'a pas pris assez d'action pour combattre la récession exclusive à la province de l'Ontario.

We are spending a lot of time talking about issues that are of little or no importance to most Ontarians. What the government isn't doing is talking about the one issue that is the greatest concern to virtually all Ontarians, and that issue is the economy. The tourists are going to come here anyway. At a time when the economies of BC and Alberta and Saskatchewan and Quebec and Nova Scotia—

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In either official language, the member must address the bill under discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I was listening to what the honourable member said, and he was expressing his opinion about the bill. Go forward.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll address the bill very directly. What difference does the language on the signs make if the people of Ontario don't have the money to travel to them? That's the bottom line.

I applaud the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for his efforts here today. I know he's well-intentioned. It is, however, long past due that the government start working on the single most important issue to Ontarians, and that is the economy. That's how the relationship between what I've been saying and the member's bill comes together.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I think that the content of this bill is probably fairly useful. Everyone in this chamber and, I would think, the overwhelming majority of people in Ontario would think that having bilingual signs in our parks is something that should have happened ages ago. In fact, that's one of the things that puzzles me about this bill: that it wasn't dealt with in the ministry as a regulation. It's quite extraordinary.

There's no question that in this country, but in this province in particular, the identity of Canadians, the identity of Ontarians, is one that has the French fact interwoven into its reality. When I'm here, I know that I'm not in Pennsylvania or Ohio because I do encounter French on products and on signs, and frankly, that's a wonderful part of this country. What is extraordinary to me is that a private member's bill has to be brought forward and debated here and is not simply implemented by the government of the day. It's a mystery to me.

I agree with the member that for francophone tourists who come to Ontario, they must find it somewhat disorienting that the signs are not already bilingual. There is no question that in this province, the whole issue of how we provide ourselves with a living, how we provide ourselves with a healthy economy, is a central question. Making it easier, more comfortable, more at home for people to come here from Quebec, from other parts of la francophonie, is a very useful thing. But again I say to the member, who is acting in good faith: Why is it that this simply has not already been done as a regulation? I find it extraordinary that that's the state of things.

The Niagara Escarpment Commission is already covered under the French Language Services Act since the act applies to government agencies, which include commissions whose members or directors are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. So it could simply be done to just say, "Government agencies: Where you operate parks, make sure that those signs are bilingual."

So again, I think that the member deserves credit for bringing it here, but I think it's extraordinary that it has to go through this process when, in fact, that could be done far more quickly through regulation. I'm not normally one who fights for regulation, but I know that we've gone through first reading, this will be second reading, there may or may not be third reading. As you well know, many, many—in fact, almost all—private members' bills that come through here are subject to debate that is sometimes perfunctory, sometimes in-depth, but very rarely do they go on to be legislation.

I would say to the Premier and the cabinet, take this bill and simply direct that your staff write the regulations within the powers that you already have and proceed with implementation. There's no need to wait for the tourist season of 2009 or 2010. It could be started right now. There's no need for us to wait for third reading, for proclamation. It's all there and it's all something that should be done now. Clearly, the money exists in this province. Last year, we went through the whole slushgate affair. There was money that was shoveled out the door at an incredible rate, so apparently cash is available. Signs are not the most expensive things in the world to replace. The funds are available; the need is clearly demonstrated. The reality of the culture of this province, the reality of the roots—les racines—of this province are there for everyone to see.

We have to ask, will this McGuinty government look beyond the signs? Will it look to the other elements of promoting bilingualism in this province? Will it look to other steps—and I hope that it does—to strengthen the francophone reality in Ontario and, in doing that, strengthen our identity as Canadians? There's no reason that this government could not expand further services in French.

Again, I appreciate the actions of the member. I just think that we, the province as a whole, would be more quickly served if this government took its responsibilities, enacted regulations and moved this forward.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to rise in this House today and speak in support of Bill 21, An Act to require bilingual signs in provincial parks, parks under the control of the Niagara Parks Commission and at major provincial tourist attractions.

Ontario is one of the most popular travel destinations in the world and it is home to some of the largest and most unique parks known to man. It is these parks, among countless other sightseeing opportunities, that make Ontario an attractive tourist destination.

Ontario's tourism is a fast-growing industry and it is reputable for providing everyone, from within and abroad, the best experience possible. We have an outstanding transportation system to make the going easy; we can provide accommodations to suit everyone's needs, desires and means. Most importantly, we are known to offer the best recreational and entertainment activities possible to both Ontarians and foreigners travelling and exploring our great province of Ontario.

Ontario has so many attractive attributes that I can go on and on about, but I can proudly say that the most attractive feature of Ontario that attracts tourism is its culture-rich society. In Ontario, you can find a European feel, and we owe this to our multicultural society and, of course, to our French community. The French culture and their beautiful language, which is Canada's second official language, brings so much to this great country and, of course, our province. Together, we are a family of one, united for eternity to serve and live in peace.

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The government of Ontario has long recognized the importance of the province's wilderness and recreational areas, such as Niagara parks, for tourism. I believe it's time that we further recognize the importance of supporting and encouraging francophone tourism from Canada and abroad.

One such thing that we may do out of courtesy and honour to francophone tourists is to facilitate their journey by placing bilingual signs in provincial parks and attractions. This will be yet another addition to the many great things that Ontario does to assist in the journeys of our tourists. Might I add that this proposal brought forward by Bill 21 would be of no extra cost to the province, as existing signs would be simply replaced by bilingual signs only as required. In my opinion, we cannot get any better than that.

I support this bill, which is being presented by my colleague the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, and hope that everyone can see that, by passing this bill, we only continue to grow and improve and prosper our great province of Ontario.

There is a bonus: It's free of cost. This great initiative will ensure that Ontario's tourism industry remains competitive in both the Canadian and global markets. But more importantly, it will help people from all around the world to realize that Ontario is truly theirs to discover, for there is no place like Ontario. Merci beaucoup.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased this afternoon to speak to the private member's bill presented by the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell: Bill 21, An Act to require bilingual signs in provincial parks, parks under the control of the Niagara Parks Commission and at major provincial tourist attractions.

I appreciate the opportunity to follow up on the comments made by other colleagues in the Legislature today and by my colleague from Thornhill. We support what the legislation proposes to do. Most of you know that I represent the riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, which in my opinion is the most beautiful area in Ontario: outstanding scenery that encompasses the Canadian Shield, farmland and many lakes, and we have many designated provincial parks in the riding. I'll list a few because there are many: Balsam Lake Provincial Park; Emily Provincial Park; Algonquin Provincial Park—we're very close to Algonquin Provincial Park; Queen Elizabeth II Wildlands Provincial Park; Indian Point Provincial Park; Kawartha Highlands—the signature site—Provincial Park; and Petroglyphs Provincial Park, which I know is very close to my neighbour riding of Peterborough, and I know that the member from Peterborough wants me to put that in there.

We also have part of the Trent-Severn Waterway. The Kirkfield lift lock last year celebrated its 100th anniversary. It is the second-oldest lock in North America, the first of course being Peterborough lift lock, which celebrated its anniversary not too long ago too.

Mr. Jeff Leal: In 2004.

Ms. Laurie Scott: "In 2004," I hear from the member from Peterborough. You can find some of the most scenic outdoor locations in Ontario and Canada right in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

I want to point out some history of provincial parks that the previous PC government accomplished with the Ministry of Natural Resources. For example, Ontario's Living Legacy was announced in 1999. In terms of parklands and protected areas, it's world-renowned. It's an innovative strategy that included the biggest increase in the history of Ontario's system of parks and protected areas, as well as measures to help improve the business climate for northern communities, forestry, mining, and resource-based tourism and to enhance the opportunities for all of us to enjoy outdoor recreation in the province of Ontario.

It's safe to say that there's a need for a lot of signage to help identify those parks that have been established through the Living Legacy program, which created 378 new parks and protected areas that represent some 2.4 million hectares. It increased the area covered by parks and protected areas in Ontario by one quarter—the largest single expansion of parks, under the PC government, anywhere.

So out of this Living Legacy there were nine signature sites created. They contain significant natural and cultural heritage values that warrant special protection and promotion.

I mentioned the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site in my riding. It's the largest protected area south of Algonquin park. It's an immense area which includes the wetlands, lakes, rivers, streams, forest and clearing. So it's certainly a landmark in my riding. Certainly we can always do with more signage to attract people and let them know what beautiful spots we have in our riding.

The member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell indicated in the legislation that the unilingual signs be replaced by bilingual signs as needed. I appreciate that fact. It's not just quickly done; it's on an as-needed basis. Very conservative of you.

Some members have certainly questioned the need for legislation: "Why couldn't this be done in regulation?" But we are here with a private member's bill, and if this is the way we must go to get this accomplished, this is the way we must go. We hope that the government that the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell is a part of will move forward on this, maybe not like some of the other private members' bills we see.

Certainly my riding thrives on tourism. It's a huge aspect of our economic stability. There are some areas in my riding that more than triple in population during the summer season. I know many members in the Legislature who are cottagers in my riding. I say to them, thank you for the part-time constituents.

Mr. Jeff Leal: The Minister of Energy.

Ms. Laurie Scott: The Minister of Energy does, for sure. The former Minister of Finance does. I'm sure there are several more. That's great; we're happy to share our part of the world with you. It is beautiful.

We also have people from other provinces, such as Quebec, and visitors from south of our border who come up and enjoy our wonderful scenery. Sometimes it's just in the summertime. With the snow we had this year, maybe there will be more in the wintertime to enjoy the snowmobiling and that white gold that we have.

It does make sense that some signs need to be replaced and be bilingual. We welcome everyone to our area to share that.

I brought up the Trent-Severn Waterway earlier. Just this past week, I was honoured to be asked to be part of the caucus to oversee the implementation or review of the Trent-Severn Waterway, undertaken by the federal Minister of the Environment a year ago. Many volunteers sat on that committee on the areas affected by the Trent-Severn Waterway. The member for Peterborough is going to co-chair along with my federal counterpart, Barry Devolin, on this Trent-Severn Waterway panel.

It's a non-partisan caucus forming this co-operative effort to implement the report, with members at the federal and provincial levels representing those communities. I know we want to work with the municipalities. For those of you who haven't read the report yet, it's a great report, and it will do a great deal to enhance the cultural heritage significance of the Trent-Severn Waterway.

But signage is going to certainly be part of that. We want to attract more and more people to our area to enjoy it. I just invite everyone who's watching, and everyone in the Legislature who has not travelled to my riding or the Trent-Severn Waterway, to please come down and enjoy the seasons with us.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure, as always, to rise in this House. I want to say at the outset that this, of course, in the New Democratic Party, like many private members' bills, will not be what's called a whipped vote, so there's not a party line on Bill 21. Having said that, I certainly plan on supporting this bill, as does my benchmate here from Toronto–Danforth.

I commend the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for bringing it forward. I assume it's his family, or some members of his family, sitting in the gallery, so I welcome them as well. I hope they've enjoyed their trip down here and don't find this too strange.

I also echo what has been said before, which is that, as my French teacher would say, "C'est bizarre." It's strange that this has to come forward as a private member's bill and couldn't have just been dealt with as a regulation. This is just common sense, that when a sign wears out, you replace the sign with a bilingual sign. We're a bilingual country; we're a bilingual province.

This is so commonsensical—if I can use such a word—that one wonders why the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell needs to bring it forth as a private member's bill. I certainly can express the hope that it's not going to be like other backbench Liberal private members' bills. Just the other day, a member from Niagara Falls brought forward a private member's bill for the third time, a bill of apparent merit, allowing grandparents to have access to their grandchildren in the case of divorce. Again, he had to bring it forward three times. I certainly hope that's not going to be the case with this bill. I hope that the cabinet, the sanctum sanctorum of the

McGuinty government, will actually move quickly on this and pass it so that we hear the last of it, so that this just becomes law and is put into place.

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I also listened with great interest to my friend over here from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I, as a child, had a cottage on Lake Koshlong—or my family did—and I used to go to spend many wonderful summers up there. It is in fact a beautiful park. I wouldn't want to get into a discussion about what's more beautiful, Peterborough or Kawartha Lakes; in fact we travelled to both as a Haliburton cottage family. I think it would enhance the experience of our provincial parks to have signs that everyone can read—and that's really what we're talking about here: transparency and accessibility, so that when francophone members of the province travel to what is everyone's, our provincial parks, they can read the signs as easily as someone who is not a francophone—who is an anglophone. Again, it's simply common sense.

For those watching at home who wonder what we're speaking about at this point, it's Bill 21. It's a bill that's going to replace unilingual signs with bilingual signs. There's no taxpayer cost to this, hence it's a private member's bill, because they'll simply be replaced as they wear out.

Again, this makes sense. We shouldn't have to spend 50 minutes of government time on this, in this House on a Thursday afternoon, when we could be travelling to Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes or Peterborough. We should have seen this come in as a regulation under current laws. I suppose it speaks to the lack of depth of legislation left to this House to look at that we have to take up time for something that should be obvious.

Just to conclude—and I won't join the fray by talking about how beautiful downtown, west-end Parkdale–High Park is at this time of year—I invite everyone to come to High Park, the jewel of my riding. I hope when you do that the signs are replaced by bilingual signs so that, whether you're francophone or anglophone, you can find you way around. You can actually get lost in High Park; it's a big place—a beautiful place. By all means, after you've travelled to the scenic Kawarthas, Haliburton and Peterborough, please come and visit beautiful High Park in downtown Toronto, the jewel of the Parkdale–High Park riding.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: No. My friend over here asks if we do have bilingual signs, and to my knowledge, we do not. Clearly, it's a necessary step.

I would just tell the members opposite that we don't have to see this come back for a third reading. Surely something as simple, as straightforward, as commonsensical as this bill can be passed without taking more of everyone's time here. It would have allowed the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell's family to travel to High Park while they were here in Toronto for the day and enjoy themselves.

Thank you very much. I will be supporting this bill.

M^me^ Laurel C. Broten: Je suis très fière de donner mon appui au projet de loi 21, projet qui a pour objet de faire remplacer les panneaux unilingues au fur et à mesure qu'il devienne nécessaire de le faire par des panneaux bilingues dans les parcs provinciaux, dans les parcs qui sont sous contrôle de la Commission des parcs du Niagara et à l'emplacement d'autres attractions touristiques provinciales prescrites en Ontario.

En tant que quelqu'un qui vient d'une famille à demi francophone, je suis très fière de donner mon appui aujourd'hui. C'est certain que depuis 350 ans, il y a une présence francophone ici en Ontario. On a aussi plus d'un million de francophones en Ontario, et il y en a certains qui demeurent dans ma circonscription d'Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Le bilinguisme contribue à la prospérité de notre province, et le fait que l'on travaille chaque jour pour donner des services publics en français fait de nous un exemple peut-être, dans notre pays et dans le monde, d'une région qui accueille ceux qui viennent de partout, et pour qui faire l'accueil à bras ouverts dans le domaine touristique est très important. Ceux qui viennent ici, soit des touristes canadiens ou internationaux, vont être très bien accueillis s'ils trouvent leur langue primaire, qu'est le français, sur des pancartes qui leur montrent où aller ou voyager.

On a plus de 300 parcs provinciaux et 290 régions de conservation en Ontario. Ici à Toronto il y a 1 500 parcs qui comprennent trois millions d'arbres. Alors, il est certain que c'est quelque chose de très important. On est si fiers de nos parcs provinciaux, et dans ces parcs chaque année on a plus de neuf millions de visites annuelles.

Je donne mon appui à mon collègue et je suis très fière de lui. C'est certain que mon collègue de la circonscription de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell est depuis plusieurs années dans cette Législature un champion de la communauté francophone. Quand on accueille ceux qui viennent de partout dans le monde, on va les accueillir avec des pancartes bilingues pour les rassurer de pouvoir admirer nos parcs, voyager dans nos parcs et savoir que l'on a une histoire bilingue ici.

C'est certain, comme l'a dit mon collègue, que le tourisme est une grande industrie. Les gens viennent de chaque coin du monde, et on veut encourager ceux qui sont francophones à venir ici, à voyager ici. Alors, je dis à mon collègue de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell que je lui donne mon appui. Tu championnes la cause de la francophonie ici en Ontario. Bravo, et merci.

M. Mike Colle: Je voudrais appuyer le projet de loi 22 de mon collègue Jean-Marc Lalonde, de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. Ce projet de loi est très important parce qu'il a été proposé par le membre de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

I just find it a bit difficult to understand—although I agree with the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and I think she said it right. This is private members' hour. It's not about demeaning the bill and whether the bill is going to take up 10 hours of govern-

ment time; this is a private member's bill. It's something that he or she believes in. In this House, for generations we've had bills that individual members thought were important. It's not what the government thinks is important; it's what the member thinks is important. So for members to stand up and diminish the importance of this bill is quite unbecoming to the members. It is the member's decision. It is something he feels is important to him and his constituents, something he believes in strongly. It's not a matter of just some of the members presenting a bill and then the government will pass it. Private members' bills are opportunities for all of us to be advocates and champions of something we believe in. We may present it once, twice; some of us have presented bills 20 times. But it's something we advocate for.

In some cases, they become law. I've had success, with the help, in fact, of my colleague from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, with one bill that was made into law, the red-light camera legislation. He had the courage and the strength to go around the province with me to pass red-light cameras.

When I first introduced the bill, they all said, "Oh, this is crazy. This shouldn't be on the docket of the government." Well, the law was eventually passed by the government of the day. It was made into law. Now, red light cameras are saving lives all across this province, and this is why private members like this deserve people's attention.

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This is why this very important bill to the member should be looked upon as something that might be helpful. I'm sure, given his track record of determination, of hard work, that he will go to different communities, he will have petitions for this bill, and he will explain the importance of it. I'm sure that if it's viable and reasonable, this will come to fruition. That is how private members' bills influence public policy and get passed into law. It's not a matter of just introducing something and saying, "Well, this should be law." You have to work for it. You have to explain it, as he's done today, because it is an oversight. There's some technicality, some oversight with visiting our parks and not finding bilingual signs.

He has started this crusade on something he feels—he not only works on this, and it's not to say that we as members just work on what we have as private members' bills. Members work on all kinds of issues, but nothing is changed unless you work hard at it, unless you get other people to understand it and support it. As I said, this member will sure do that. All you have to do is go to Alfred, go to Hawkesbury, go to Plantagenet, go to Cumberland and see the reputation this member has of incredible hard work and dedication to his people.

So I'm sure that this bill that he is proposing will one day make a change that will benefit people. That's why I encourage you all to think about this private member's bill, not what the government wants but what this private member is advocating. I think it's a very good thing he's championing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Lalonde, you have up to two minutes for your reply.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have to say that I really appreciate the support that the three parties have shown on this private member's bill.

I also want to tell you that with me in the members' gallery today, I have two ladies that were chosen, really, at a draw of the Club de l'Âge d'or, Joie de Vivre. There was a draw to attend the debate today. They come from Embrun, Ontario, their seniors' club. They came up by train to attend the debate today, and I'm very pleased to have them with us.

Also in the gallery are my staff, who worked very hard to prepare this private member's bill.

This bill will enhance the economy by welcoming francophones in our province. We need to take this opportunity to share Ontario's great culture with the other five continents.

When I look at what happened here in the past, the NDP, when they were in power, passed a bill, a regulation, that all signage within the Legislature has to be bilingual. But on our provincial parks, we don't have that. This is why I brought that up. It is very important.

My riding borders the province of Quebec. There's not a single week that goes by without me being told, "You speak French in Ontario?" When they come into eastern Ontario, they recognize that we do have signage in French and English, but when they go down to one of the seven wonders of the world, there is no bilingual signage. This is why I thought of coming up with this bill to show the people of this province and also the other provinces like Quebec and the Maritimes, and any of the Asian countries where French is one of the working languages, that they could be served in French right here in Ontario.

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE JOUR COMMÉMORATIF DE L'HOLODOMOR

Mr. Levac moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 61, An Act to proclaim Holodomor Memorial Day / Projet de loi 61, Loi proclamant le Jour commémoratif de l'Holodomor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 97, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Dave Levac: Dobrýden. I am honoured to speak today on my private member's bill, Bill 61, the Holodomor Memorial Day Act.

First, I wish to thank and acknowledge my intern, Matt Thornton; my LA, Susan Ho; and my EA, Chris Yaccato, for their support, dedication and hard work on presenting this bill.

This act, if passed, will create an annual commemoration of the victims of the Holodomor within Ontario. It will proclaim the fourth Saturday in November of each

year in the province of Ontario as Holodomor Memorial Day.

I want to begin by welcoming—unfortunately, they haven't arrived yet, but these great guests will be joining us soon in the legislature: Mr. Orest Steciw, member of the League of Ukrainian Canadians; Mr. Olexander Danyleiko, the consul general of Ukraine; Mr. Andrew Gregorovich, member of the Ukrainian National Federation; Mr. Volodymyr Paslavskyi of the League of Ukrainian Canadians; and Ms. Anna Kasyanchuk, from the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women. I would like to thank them for all of their assistance in bringing the depth of this issue to my attention and knowledge.

For many here today, in particular the Holodomor survivors, there is no need to state this bill's significance. We know that the survivors will have many bitter memories, many recollections of personal tragedy. You will recall people you knew, family and friends who died and who now, across the years, come back to you and make your grief fresh and sadly vivid again. Today, and every day, we pay tribute to those survivors and to those who died.

The second reading of this bill is important for those who experienced the famine. It's a tribute to those who died and a tribute to the survivors. It is also enormously important for those too young to understand and feel its significance.

A great many Ontarians have no personal experience of forced, man-made famine or tyranny; no way of knowing the anguish and chaos that plagued a dictator's time in power. Unfortunately, some Ontarians have. Many of us cannot comprehend the loss that occurred in Ukraine from 1932-33. For that reason, amongst others, it's important for all Ontarians to commemorate Holodomor and the Ukrainian community that bore its burden.

For some of my colleagues and many who are watching at home, the Holodomor is unfamiliar as a human tragedy. Many have heard of Joseph Stalin and his tyrannical time in power, but few will have learned about the Ukrainian experience under his reign. In particular, few have all but passing knowledge of those terrible years from 1932-33. Roughly translated, Holodomor means "to inflict death by hunger." For the Ukrainian community, it has become synonymous with one of the darkest periods in the history of that proud nation.

From 1932-33, across the "breadbasket of Europe," as many as 10 million Ukrainians perished under the rule of Stalin as he forcibly collectivized the farms, confiscating food and leaving Ukrainian farmers with nothing. Any adult—man or woman—caught taking grain from the collective was shot on sight. Children were taken away and never heard from again. It is incredible to think that a child as young as four years old who might hold a handful of grain so small that it wouldn't fill a shot glass would simply disappear, yet the treatment continued for almost two years, with almost 25,000 people dying daily at the height of the famine's peak.

As I began my research into the Holodomor, perhaps the greatest impact on me during this insanity was the plight of the children. I've seen many photos of children with finger-thin legs, bloated stomachs and gaunt faces. Children died in their homes with their families. There were situations where children outlived their parents and were left alone to fend for themselves. With no other option, many would leave their home and later be found lying somewhere in a ditch, lying alone, forgotten and dead. There were cases where parents in despair would send their children out to search the countryside for food. Then the mother would leave their home with the last child alive, only to succumb later in a ditch, alone, forgotten and dead. As sad and insane as these stories are, this tragedy truly came into focus for me when I had the honour of meeting Holodomor survivors and activists in my own riding of Brant.

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I would like to take a moment to pay tribute in particular to two remarkable women in the Ukrainian community in my riding. It is a strong, vibrant and proud community, one that has helped build the foundations of our city itself and one that continues to make the riding of Brant one of the best places to live in this province. It is a community that only 35 years ago commemorated the Holodomor by having a mock funeral at the Ukrainian Catholic Church of St. John the Baptist on Terrace Hill Street.

As I mentioned, it's a community that is home to a number of Holodomor survivors, like Zena Semywolos of Brantford. Zena grew up just outside of Kiev. She was 10 years old when this man-made famine hit in 1932. Living with just her mother and two sisters, Zena considers herself lucky. Lucky, you say? Lucky because her mother was a teacher and was given half a kilo of flour per child and a kilo for herself per week to eat. With this flour, the Semywoloses were able to make enough soup and bread to sustain themselves during those perilous times.

Many of her friends in her community of 31,000 were not so lucky. Many sold everything they had to buy food, and many lost their lives because they ran out of stuff to sell to buy food. But amid the suffering, as always happens, the spirit of human compassion was evident. Zena's mother often shared her ration of flour with her neighbours, although it barely fed her and her children.

Commemorating the sacrifice by Zena and all Ukrainians is another resident of my riding, Mrs. Marsha Skrypuch, of Brantford. Marsha has written two award-winning books on the Holodomor—a children's folk tale called Enough, about a young girl's attempt to save her village from starvation; and a short story, The Rings—which have been praised by critics and colleagues alike for their ability to explore the Holodomor in a sensitive, accessible and acceptable manner for children and adults alike, so much so that Marsha has been recognized for her work by the Ukrainian government and will receive the Order of Princess Olha from Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko on May 25 this year. I must extend my heartfelt congratulations to Marsha and her courageous work on the Holodomor. It serves as an invaluable resource on this historic tragedy for younger generations.

I must also extend a tremendous thank-you to her father-in-law, Dr. John Skrypuch, of Brantford, for his tireless work in mobilizing the local Ukrainian community in Brant around this issue and his continuing support and lifelong dedication to his people, in particular his loving wife, Lidia Skrypuch, who passed away just recently. I dedicate this speech to her.

From Brant, from all over Ontario and Canada, and most of all, from Ukraine itself, support for this bill is widespread. After I introduced the Holodomor Memorial Day Act, I had the pleasure of meeting with Yuri Kostenko, the deputy foreign minister of Ukraine, and Oleksander Danyleiko, consul general of Ukraine here in Toronto. They expressed their sincere thanks to this Legislature for considering this bill and carrying it on first reading. They informed me of the support it has back in Ukraine from the president, who will visit Ontario at the end of May this year. I can think of no better way of strengthening our relationship with this proud eastern European country than by educating Ontarians about this tragic but important date in Ukraine's history.

Ontario is not the only jurisdiction to consider condemning the Holodomor. The United States House of Representatives, the United States Senate, UNESCO, the United Nations General Assembly and over 40 other jurisdictions around the world have officially condemned the Holodomor.

But while the world condemns, here in Ontario we have an opportunity to go just one step further. Through the creation of Holodomor Memorial Day, we will become the first province in Canada and the first outside Ukraine to commemorate this sinister period in humanity's history as a memorial day. In Ontario, we pride ourselves on acceptance, on human rights and on multiculturalism. For these reasons, I can think of no better opportunity to continue to show the true spirit of the province that recognizes the heritage of newcomers, welcoming them with open arms, and then to commemorate our Ukrainian community with this bill.

In closing, "Never again" has often been used as a rallying cry of outrage with crimes against humanity. That is why commemorating Holodomor through the efforts of the League of Ukrainian Canadians, the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the Council of Ukrainian Credit Unions of Canada, through the novels of my constituent Marsha Skrypuch, and through acts of Parliament is so important. For the 1.5 million Ukrainians in Canada, Ukrainians all over the world and all of the victims of tyranny and oppression, I ask for your support today to send this bill to committee, so that we can truly proclaim: "Never again."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I am pleased to rise today to support Bill 61, introduced by my friend the member from Brant, the riding next to me. This bill, if passed, will create Holodomor Memorial Day on the fourth Saturday in November and honour the memory of the victims of the Holodomor.

They were victims of a forced, planned starvation. "The world must know about this tragedy." That was the statement that the Ukrainian president, Viktor Yushchenko, made at the opening of an exhibition dedicated to the victims of the famine. Through efforts like this legislation, across the world, people are learning and remembering what occurred in the Ukraine in the early 1930s. The UN has recognized the tragedy, as have numerous countries around the world.

I want to commend the League of Ukrainian Canadians and the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women for all their work here in Ontario to ensure that the suffering of those who perished in this tragedy is remembered. I know that both of these groups met with many members of this House to ensure that everyone was aware of the terrible events of 1932 and 1933. It cannot have been easy for them to share the personal stories of suffering, and I want to commend them all for doing so, to ensure that the people understand what happened. I want to thank Lily and Grant Hopcroft of London for meeting with me and sharing their own family stories. It is clear that many years later, the effects of this suffering are still felt and remembered by Ukrainians around the world.

I want to tell you that until that presentation, I was not aware of what had occurred. Many times in my life, I'd heard about the famine in the Ukraine, but I had never heard that it was a forced famine, that in fact it could have been, and should have been, avoided. I'm pleased that through this bill, we will be able to demonstrate that we too remember and that we want to honour the millions of people who died terrible deaths during that time.

This devastation was made worse by the fact that it was not an act of nature. There was no drought or bad harvest. This was the deliberate act of evil and greed. It was a deliberate attempt to exterminate Ukrainian peasants.

In 1932, the USSR exported 1.6 million tons of grain, and in 1933, that increased to 2.1 million tons of grain. State distilleries were operating at full capacity turning grain into alcohol, and the USSR was maintaining a strategic reserve with over one million tons of grain. Yet, in the Ukraine, there was no food. Holodomor was the forced starvation of a nation.

In 1932 and 1933, Stalin imposed vicious laws that were designed to starve Ukrainians and crush their national spirit. By early 1932, three quarters of the Ukrainian farmers were collectivized. Stalin imposed high grain quotas on the farms in order to achieve his goal of financing his plans with the revenue from grain exports. All Ukrainian grain was seized, and when farms failed to meet the impossibly high quotas, they were punished with fines in kind that allowed confiscation of any other food the soldiers could find.

As further punishment, farms and villages that failed to meet their quotas could be banned from buying kerosene, matches and other necessities. Villages had all their food confiscated and were then surrounded by armed forces who used force to stop any goods from entering the village and to stop people from escaping.

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Stalin imposed severe penalties on people taking anything from the collective farms, which now belonged to the state. Taking food from the farms they once owned was punishable by a long prison sentence or even death. The grain harvests were gone, other foods were confiscated and the Ukrainian people were left to starve. When people left their homes desperately searching for food, Stalin forced them back with armed force and used those forces to isolate the Ukrainian people.

We can only imagine the hunger, fear and desperation of the people. We can only imagine a situation where there were so many deaths that it was beyond counting. It is beyond comprehension that anyone could be so cruel as to inflict this type of torture and suffering. Yet, in that tragedy, there were stories of the strength of the people and their own historic sacrifices: stories of parents who risked their lives to sneak their children through military lines to try to save them; people who risked their own lives to tell the world about the genocide.

These people must be remembered and honoured. Last November marked the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor. In that time, Ukrainians have rebuilt their lives and communities. Many came to Ontario and have made significant contributions to our province. But although they are moving forward, they have not forgotten what they, their ancestors and their relatives experienced.

In Ukraine, the fourth Saturday of November has been established as a day to commemorate the victims of the Holodomor. I'm pleased that through this legislation Ontario will also be able to take this day to ensure that the people who were lost in this tragedy are not forgotten. Through this day of recognition, I hope that we can educate people about their suffering and, in doing so, prevent future tragedies.

I want to thank you for allowing me to say a few words on this, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank our visitors in the galleries for being here to witness this today.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise today particularly in honour of a friend of mine and an activist in the Parkdale–High Park community who passed away in her 90s not too long ago. She was someone I would characterize as a true Christian, a member of our congregation who came from Ukraine just after the Second World War.

One day, while sitting at her kitchen table over about the fourth cup of tea, she introduced me to the term Holodomor. I'll call her Anya, because Anya would want to be remembered as she was in totality, and not just for this experience. Anya was a social activist. She was active in the Parkdale–High Park New Democratic Party riding association and, like many of the other Ukrainians, was active in a number of social service missions as part of my church congregation.

Anya told me, sitting at her kitchen table, about what it was like to be a young girl during the years 1932 and 1933, when forced collectivization, the Stalinist pogroms and the Stalinist forced famine, which is the Holodomor, killed 25,000 people a day. They say 10 million in total: seven million Ukrainians, of which three million were children.

She said her job every day for her household was to go out and collect grass and leaves—anything they could make soup out of—that they would boil. She said that one day she came home and to her horror—it was late at night—saw her mother cutting up human flesh in the kitchen.

She said to me—I will never forget these words—"I survived because I ate the flesh of dead bodies. Will God ever forgive me?" I'm standing here today to say there was nothing she needed to be forgiven for, but there is certainly something that the western powers, the Soviet Union and all of those who subscribed to the Stalinist terror need to be forgiven for.

If we cast our minds back to this time, what is so horrendous is the silence. What is so horrendous about the Holodomor is that people don't know about it. They don't know how many died; they don't know the atrocities that were committed against the Ukrainian people.

You know, this is an incredible people. In 1917, as the Czarist monarchy fell, that was the time when they began to assert their independence and for four long years fought the Germans, the Poles, the Red Russians, the White Russians—fought just for independence. That is all that Ukrainians have ever wanted.

There was a wonderful movement that flourished in the 1920s, even after Lenin invaded the country and took it as part of the USSR. It was a wonderful movement of intellectuals, artists and writers, culled away from Russia, which tried desperately to assert a new kind of nationalism, even under Communism. They brought this interesting movement that, again, sought to get some territory back, even after Stalin had taken over the Politburo and murdered just about everybody else who stood in his way. So I also rise for all of those intellectuals, all of those nationalists, all of those who fought for a free Ukraine, because, after all, that's why the famine was imposed upon them. It was to break the back of Ukrainian nationalism.

My friend Anya was called a kulak. That's what they called any peasants who had any land. Her house was stolen from her. Her father was shipped off and she never saw him again. The house was taken away from her family, and she and her family, like so many others, were forced into collectivized farming, which of course was a horror.

I want to recognize that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was also a target of Stalin's terror; that priests were rounded up, deported and executed; that the metropolitan of the time was never heard from again; that bells were pulled down, spires were destroyed and icons were smashed in front of the folk who worshipped there. That's what it was to live in the Ukraine during the Holodomor.

Three quarters of all farms were collectivized, and 80% of all the farmers and peasants who worked on those collectivized farms were not paid. They were slave

labour. My friend Anya talked about her brother, who was a young Communist activist at one point. She said that after he saw the massive starvation, he said to her, "I wish I could eat my words; I would, because there's nothing else left to eat." She also talked about the fact that the horses were fed at night so that the peasants wouldn't steal the fodder from the horses to eat themselves. They needed the horses to be at least well enough to drag away the corpses, the bodies. As I've said, they were dying at the rate of about 25,000 people a day. The farmers, as you've heard, were not allowed to work anywhere else and they were not allowed to leave the country.

I have to say here that the western world knew what was going on. They knew enough to raise relief in many countries but the relief couldn't get through because Stalin wouldn't admit to the famine and wouldn't open the borders to let the relief through. Stalin, in fact, said something which I think rings with what his regime was about. He said, "The kulak wants with his boney hand to strangle the neck of the revolution. With this famine, we will turn the boney hand of the kulak against himself." By the year 1933, a thousand per hour were starving to death.

It's interesting that when Hitler invaded Ukraine in 1941, it was Hitler who uncovered the mass graves in Ukraine, and he did it, of course, in part, to divert international attention away from his own mass graves. A lot of the footage that we get, a lot of the photographs that Anya shared with me, that I've seen, come from that period of time when these mass graves were uncovered. And they look just like any other genocide: thousands upon thousands of bodies.

It's interesting; I was on the Avi Lewis show after having this conversation with Anya and after learning what I could about the Holodomor—and I should say, absolutely, that the Ukrainian social services on Bloor Street, an incredible organization, one of the first to whom I donated my pay increase last year, does amazing work, and much of their work is with survivors of that period of time. I was on the Avi Lewis show debating a well-known atheist author named Richard Dawkins. Richard Dawkins' whole point was that religion, particularly Christianity, was responsible for much of the killing that has gone on in history. I was proud to rise—and I wasn't alone—to say that in fact the major genocides of the 20th century were not done in the name of faith; they were done by those who were avowed atheists. They were done by Stalin, Pol Pot, Hitler and Mao. So when you look at the sum total of death, you look at death that really is a slap in the face of God, that is at the feet of God, that is not, and never pretended to be, of God.

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What's missing, and what this bill will do, is to make us all aware of what we should all be aware of, and that is of this horrendous blight in history, which is the harvest of suffering. What it should do is be taught in our schools. So that's one thing that I would ask: that I hope that somewhere the Minister of Education is listening to this, listening to these words. Certainly there should be studies in our schools that focus on genocide, and this should be part of those studies.

Again, hopefully it won't just be a day, but it will be a day of real remembrance, a day when our schools remember, a day when children of all backgrounds are taught what it looks like when people do not stand up against terror or when they cannot stand up against terror. The one thing I will say for the Ukrainians is that they always resisted, and the more they resisted, the more the heavy hand of Stalin came down upon them. All along, they withdrew their labour, they fought back, they did what they could, and all along, this heavy hand came down upon their lives.

As I stand here, I'm very aware that we are not alone in this chamber. There are not many of us here—I wish there were more to hear about the Holodomor—but what we do have in this chamber is a cloud of witnesses. I think of the seven million who perished; I think of the three million children; I think that their spirits are somewhere in this House as we talk about this day of commemoration, and that those spirits, those clouds of witnesses, will always be around when we honour those who died and weren't honoured, who often died without a name attached and in mass graves.

Just to sum up: My friend Anya, when she passed away in her 90s—this amazing woman had this wonderful smile on her face and never complained; an amazing, hardworking, beautiful woman. She said to me, "I tried to live so that God would forgive me." She never got that horrendous scene out of her head, the scene replicated around her town, which was just outside of Kiev, because when you're starving and your children are starving, you will do anything—anything—to feed them. I'd like to think that this day, as we stand in this House, this day that we remember those 10 million who were lost and haven't been remembered adequately, there's no question that this day we will start to rectify that.

My friend across the aisle from Brant mentioned that this has already been recognized by the American government. It has already been recognized in the United Nations too. It has been recognized in the Canadian Senate, and I thought it had been recognized in Alberta, but correct me if I'm wrong.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: No? That was part of the information that we were given. Certainly, we should be the first in Canada as a jurisdiction to recognize this, and we should recognize it with all the import that it deserves.

Again, let's not just have a day; let's have a day of true remembrance, when those who don't know will know, those who haven't heard will hear, those who have forgotten will remember, and those who have been silenced will be allowed to speak through us.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Dobrýden. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 61, and to support my colleague the member from Brant, who has brought forward An Act to proclaim Holodomor Memorial Day.

As we stand in the House, I don't think that we can truly comprehend the tragedy and loss that occurred when as many as 10 million Ukrainians perished from 1932-33 as victims of a man-made famine in Ukraine, named Holodomor, under Joseph Stalin's regime, with 25,000 dying each day at the peak of the famine.

As has been said, the government of Ukraine, the United States House of Representatives, the United States Senate, the Senate of Canada, UNESCO, the United Nations and a number of other jurisdictions around the world have officially condemned Holodomor and recognized it as a genocide.

By joining today, I believe that by annually remembering the victims of the Holodomor through the passage of this bill, we will ensure that the story of a great tragedy is transferred from generation to generation. It will allow us to learn more from it and raise awareness to prevent similar occurrences around the world. Through passage of this bill, we will encourage communities and educators to teach, remember and honour the memory of those who suffered most in a battle where food was used as a weapon.

As colleagues before me have spoken about the children, I have turned my mind to my grandmother, who raised 10 children through some very, very difficult times. One thing she said was that she didn't have much, but she was so proud of the fact that, through her hard work, she was always able to feed those children. As a mother of two young children, I cannot imagine the anguish and horror you would feel as a parent when you are unable to feed your children—unable to look after their most basic need—and know that those actions and that deprivation are being forced upon you, your family and your children by government action and the decision of a horrific leader who is seeking to undertake those horrible acts.

Ukrainian communities around the world commemorate Holodomor Memorial Day on the fourth Saturday of November each and every year. If this act is passed, I look forward to the opportunity when we in Ontario will be able to stand along with those from the Ukrainian community and others who care about this significant and important issue, to turn our minds to the tragedy, to move one step forward in bringing some light on these tragic circumstances and to raise awareness about what transpired in Ukraine.

As MPP for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I want to pay tribute to the Ukrainian community in my riding, which is strong and vibrant, and which has welcomed me with open arms. I want to acknowledge the work undertaken in raising this issue by the League of Ukrainian Canadians, the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and Ukrainian-Canadian communities across Ontario, including so many individual Ukrainians who have told their stories or their families' stories with the goal of helping us ensure that such a tragedy would never occur again. To my colleague from Brant, I say thank you. Dyakuju.

Mr. Frank Klees: I am pleased to participate in this debate, and thank my colleague the member for Brant for bringing forward this bill. It is a bill I am pleased to support. As the member knows, on December 5, 2006, I made a statement in this House in recognition of this important event, and I want to want to read into the record some context for the Holodomor.

Before I do, I want to welcome to the Legislature our special guests representing the Ukrainian community, and to thank you for the work you have done on behalf of all of us to ensure that we do not forget.

Applause.

Mr. Frank Klees: I also want to take the opportunity to bring to the attention of members of the House this book, entitled Holodomor: Ukrainian Genocide in the Early 1930s. It has been very helpful. I want to thank those who were involved in producing this very much. The Ukrainian Institute of National Memory acknowledged the many contributors to this booklet. I urge members, if they don't have a copy, to have it available. It should be in every school in the province of Ontario.

From November 2007 to November 2008, Ukrainians around the world will be commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Ukrainian famine genocide called the Holodomor. On November 28, 2006, the Ukrainian Parliament recognized the famine as a genocide, and many parliamentary bodies in various countries around the world have done the same.

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As many as 10 million Ukrainians died in Soviet Ukraine from hunger and accompanying diseases during the great famine of 1932-33. Ironically, there was no drought or floods, and the crops were good; the destruction of human life was man-made, conscious, and it was deliberate. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of ethnic Ukrainians also died in the adjacent regions of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, especially the Kuban province of the northern Caucasus region. Ukrainians have appropriately named this catastrophe the Holodomor, or "extermination by hunger," and today it is rightfully considered a genocide against the Ukrainian people as such.

Ukrainians suffered three major famines under the communist regime: in 1921 to 1923, 1932-33, and again 1946-47. But it was the second tragedy, the most costly in terms of human life and the one which threatened the very survival of the Ukrainian nation, that is now considered the main component of the Ukrainian genocide.

The Ukrainian rural population, which at that time was made up of over 80% of Ukraine's inhabitants and constituted the backbone of the Ukrainian nation, was the main target of the regime's ire, which lead to starvation. However, the Ukrainian genocide extended to the whole of the Ukrainian nation, for, concurrently with the destruction of the Ukrainian farmers, Stalin's regime decimated the Ukrainian cultural, social and political elite. Even Ukrainian communists were not trusted, and many of them were persecuted and eliminated. The Ukrainian nation was crippled and stunted in all spheres of its collective life.

Half a million people died in Ukraine from famine in the winter of 1932. The summer brought some relief as

people scoured the countryside for berries, nuts, mushrooms and various surrogates. The famine returned in the fall, and the most intensive period was the winter and spring of 1933. Learning about the famine, the west offered to help the starving people, but this aid was cynically rejected by Moscow, and any mention of the famine was denounced as anti-Soviet propaganda. Dishonest western journalists such as Walter Duranty, intellectuals such as Bernard Shaw and politicians such as Edouard Herriot did not help when they parroted Moscow's lies and silenced the rare testimony of such honest journalists as Gareth Jones and Malcolm Muggeridge.

The genocide was to be for Ukrainians what the Holocaust was for the Jews and the genocide of 1915 was for the Armenians: a tragedy of unfathomable proportions that traumatized the nation, leaving it with deep, social, psychological, political and demographic scars that Ukraine bears to this very day. Stalin himself is reported to have said, "No one can deny that the total Ukrainian yield of grain in 1932 was larger than in 1931," and yet about 10 million Ukrainians died that year of a man-made famine as the communist state made its failed attempt to crush the freedom-loving Ukrainian people.

On behalf of the leader of the Ontario PC Party and on behalf of our entire caucus, I extend our sincere condolences to Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, whose own relatives were victims of that genocide, and I extend our deepest sympathies to the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and to the worldwide Ukrainian community on this tragic anniversary. May the memory of the victims of the Holodomor be eternal.

Remarks in Ukrainian.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I am honoured to stand up and speak in support of the bill brought by my colleague from Brant, Bill 61, An Act to proclaim Holodomor Memorial Day.

I've been listening to many speakers in this House speaking about the importance of this initiative. They spoke eloquently, from the Conservatives to the NDP to our colleagues, about the tragedy the Ukrainian people faced.

I was reading a paper here that talks about the whole issue, when Stalin, on August 7, 1932, "authored a law with a sentence of death or 10 years' imprisonment for the misappropriation of collective farm property. This law led to mass arrests and executions. Even children caught picking handfuls of grain from fields were convicted." It became a genocide for many Ukrainians who lived in that era.

It's important to talk about these issues, to remember and to remind people around us that there is nothing better than democracy and freedom, and that we as a people on this earth should use our authority in a fair way. Remember the people who suffered before us, who got killed for no reason, just because they happened to be in the charge of a dictator who did not believe in anything except himself and his authority. That is what happened in 1932 to Stalin, who authored those laws, who forced people to die, to starve, who tortured people just in the name of his authority and his ideology.

I want to welcome the people from the Ukrainian community who are with us today. I also want to tell you something very important. The Ukrainian community is a great community across the province of Ontario, especially in my riding of London–Fanshawe. It's vibrant and active. I had the chance to meet many of them, and they told me about the tragedy they faced in the Stalin era. They told me in detail about the horrible life they lived, and a few survivors living in London today are still speaking about it. They still remember it. They tell their children and the people around them about the tragedy they faced around that time.

I want to congratulate my colleague the member from Brant for bringing this issue forward to this House. Hopefully it will get the support from all the members because it's important to remember people and bring awareness to this House and our colleagues, to be an example and also to tell the story about the tragedies. Hopefully in the future, nobody will do it again against any community, against any ethnic group, against anyone living among us in this life because, as my colleague mentioned, God gave us the authority to understand and to comprehend and also to protect the vulnerable people among us. You have to remember: It doesn't matter how big we are; in the end, all of us are going to die. We have to remember to use our power wisely in order to protect the lives among us and around us.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm proud to stand here today and to be supportive of the member for Brant's bill recognizing the Holodomor. I do this as the member of this House representing Etobicoke Centre, especially so because I am of Ukrainian descent, but even more so because I am an individual who believes fundamentally that we must constantly remember the past in order to ensure that we do not replicate it in the future.

I've sat, I've listened, I've read and I've had the opportunity to view the video. I can't even begin to understand the kind of horror that people must have gone through. It's almost unfathomable to me when I live in such an extraordinary country surrounded with the kind of democracy that we do have. To think that people went through such extraordinary—I can't even think of another word other than "horror." As a mother—and I think my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore shares the same thing; I think we all do—how can you even consider that your child might eat grass for dinner to try to survive, or that you hold this dying child in your arms and it was totally preventable? It was simply because somebody in another area of Russia at the time determined that you should die. That is man's inhumanity to man, so extreme that, to me, I just have trouble fathoming it.

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But what is it I can do? What I can do is ensure that that memory isn't lost by recognizing this memorial day—Saskatchewan just did it yesterday—by adding our voice to 14 countries and 40 jurisdictions, the United

Nations and whomever. What we're able to do is, each and every time there's an opportunity—and it should never just be on one day a year—is to share, to ensure that children learn.

We learn in a variety of ways. It could be in school, without question, but a lot of sharing comes through parents at the dinner table, over breakfast, when you walk through a park and you see a memorial or when you experience a memorial day. Those are the kinds of learning that actually become ingrained in a child to ensure as they develop that never again will they allow such horror to occur.

That's why we have an opportunity within this House, by providing a commemorative day, to expand that knowledge base, and we can ensure that, in fact, it never happens again. But more importantly, we can teach the children why it happened in the first place and must never be repeated, and what responsibility they have to each other, as was determined by my friend from London–Fanshawe.

We live in a world together. We must find peace together. We must be able to work together. But the only way we're able to do this is if we constantly remember our past. We must never shed the past. We must always take the past into the future, and this is one of the ways we can do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Levac, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to start by saying thank you to the members from Oxford, Parkdale–High Park, Newmarket–Aurora, Etobicoke Centre, Etobicoke–Lakeshore and London–Fanshawe for their very passionate and kind words about the issue.

All too often we're bombarded with reminders of the evils committed against humanity. I think all of us here would agree that while these events infuriate us, terrify us and make us weep, often we lack the knowledge to impart a successful course of action to prevent their repetition.

Every great achievement of mankind has come with the expression of knowledge, enlightenment, passion and, indeed, dare I say, love. This expression is all about helping us eradicate the ills of our communities. It helps spread democracy. It helped connect millions of people around the world. It did eradicate slavery, in a sense. The spread of knowledge will also one day stop examples that we're talking about today. That would be my hope and, I know, our dream.

Perhaps the best way to acquire knowledge is through commemoration. With the passing of the Holodomor Memorial Day Act, we will commemorate the Ukrainian community that lost so much just 75 years ago. Equally important, it will educate Ontarians, young and old, about the costs of oppression and cruelty. Through education and remembrance, Ontario can continue to be the beacon of hope, acceptance, freedom and peace.

Today, we have an opportunity to take one more step further in that cause. I urge my colleagues to join me and the Ukrainian community in supporting the bill, sending it to committee so our friends can tell their story again, and reaffirming our solidarity against opposition, tyranny and persecution.

HEALTH PROMOTION

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's my privilege to begin today's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Qaadri, excuse me; you have to move your motion. Read your motion, please.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you. Move second reading, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): You would say, "I move notice of motion," and then read your motion.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario use all avenues to help people learn about their vital, medically significant numbers, including blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, waist circumference, height, weight and body mass index.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Qaadri moves private member's resolution number 33.

Pursuant to standing order 97, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thanks for the tolerance on the preliminaries. As I've mentioned, I'm privileged today, first of all, to move this particular private member's resolution, which I think will have, if adopted and if passed, some fairly significant impact on the health of Ontarians and possibly broadly. Before beginning, I'd like to thank, once again, my staff members, including David Shory; my executive assistant, Nick Nobile, at the constituency office; and my former executive assistant, Kosta Chialtas.

I'm also honoured, delighted and pleased that my colleagues in the Liberal caucus, my fellow physician parliamentarians—or MD MPPs—Dr. Kuldip Kular, the MPP for Bramalea–Gore–Malton, and Dr. Helena Jaczek, the MPP for Oak Ridges–Markham, will be joining me in supporting this particular resolution.

When a patient comes to a physician—let's say they're being assessed for cardiovascular disease, which, by the way, is fancy doctor talk or code for heart and blood vessels—cardiovascular—there are about 10, maybe 15 questions that run in our minds as a kind of subtext to that particular encounter, to actually assess whether this individual is due, destined, prone to and will eventually develop cardiovascular or heart and blood vessel disease. This is a group of diseases that I remind you, if present trends continue, something on the order of about 40% of Ontarians—40% of the people listening to me now—will eventually die of.

Those 10 or 15 questions are something like, "Does this individual have high cholesterol? Does this individual have high blood pressure? Does this individual have high sugar or sugar diabetes already? Are they obese or overweight? Do they have excess stress, poor

diet, excess salt, marital conflict?" There's a long, long list of factors that go into the production, manifestation and expression of these various diseases.

The thing to say, though, is that this group of conditions, cardiovascular diseases, which of course include things like angina, heart attacks and diabetes—because, by the way, diabetes is heart disease. It's many other things, but it is also heart disease. These are, unfortunately, reaching epidemic, explosion, levels.

We used to, for example, think and be taught as doctors that you had to be 40 or better before you would start actually manifesting a lot of these types of disease conditions. Before you were going to get blood pressure, sugar diabetes or a judicious combination, you had to be 40 or 45; you had to be middle-aged or better.

The problem with the super-sized generation, with the explosion of obesity, with the availability of fast food everywhere and of course many other reasons, is that we now are seeing individuals at younger and younger ages, not only even the 30s and 20s—having, by the way, bypass surgery—but even young kids in their teens, who are not only obese but are developing diabetes, even developing, for example, degenerative arthritis in the knees, crushing their knees because of their weight and lack of exercise.

This again, as my physician colleagues or physician parliamentarians will share with you, is something that's extremely alarming. It's really part of, by the way, one of these feelings or suppositions is that the generations that are now being born in Ontario may be among the very first generations that actually live for shorter periods of time—have less life expectancy—than their parents.

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So the intent of the resolution, as it says at the beginning, is that the government of Ontario use all avenues. Now, of course, I mean that quite specifically: things like print, Web, radio, television or newsletters, for example, that we might actually distribute in our householders and to our ridings. All of these types of venues are important for us to synergize so that we can get some of these messages across.

There are many opportunities, as I personally myself do work with a number of top-flight organizations. Whether it's industry or the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Canadian Diabetes Association or the Ontario Lung Association, all of these are important and intelligent and dedicated players in this particular domain. They, too, are doing their share to, for example, add to the curricula of schools, add to the awareness amongst the population and add to the Canadian conversation regarding heart disease and cardiovascular illness.

Along with this resolution and along with this deciphering or this instruction on the word "cardiovascular," I want to bring to the attention not only of this chamber and my colleagues but also, through you, Speaker, to the people of Ontario perhaps a term that we as physicians are becoming more and more familiar with but that may not be part of the usual currency amongst the general public, and that is what we call cardiometabolic syndrome. This is essentially a grab-bag, package label of a whole number of conditions that go into the making of heart disease and stroke, kidney failure and so much else. Essentially, it's about the evils of obesity and all the complications that that leads to. So the cardiometabolic syndrome is essentially the idea that heart disease may be triggered by diabetes—they may be self-reinforcing—and it's this idea of a negative, self-reinforcing, vicious circle/cycle that it is our intention of trying to bring some light upon in this resolution.

I remember, in the first or second caucus meeting in the first McGuinty mandate—of multiple mandates to follow, no doubt—in November 2003, getting up in caucus and saying that we should create, in addition to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, a ministry of preventive health. Eventually this was adopted, and it is now, as you will know, known as the Ministry of Health Promotion. But part of the thinking that I had when I suggested that particular initiative was that, if truth be told, the Ministry of Health is actually the ministry of disease care. Now, I have to compliment Minister Smitherman in that he too recognizes this and is now moving into the idea or the sphere of screening and monitoring and measuring before disease takes place, whether it's with prostate cancer or colorectal cancer or breast cancer and so on. But by and large, the Ministry of Health and its initiatives and programs were really about the ministry of disease care.

I think, as my physician colleagues in this chamber will tell you, that that is perhaps too late in the game to be actually offering therapy and education and treatment and monitoring. If we were able to use our resources here in the government of Ontario to measure the different parameters or encourage people to go and seek out measurements of all these key, vital, medically significant numbers—specifically, as I mentioned earlier, blood pressure, cholesterol level, blood sugar, waist circumference, and height-weight and any mismatch there may be, otherwise known as the body mass index—we would be much further ahead.

I must compliment the Minister of Health Promotion at the time, the Honourable Jim Watson, where we actually began this particular program. I'll just confidentially share with you, Speaker, that as we were in fact having support from the nurses' associations and the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the diabetes association, there were two members of this chamber who were diagnosed with diabetes on the spot. I think, as well, that a number of individuals who had been flagged for having pretty significant high blood pressure—no doubt in the service of their cabinet ministers—were also identified and obviously encouraged to seek appropriate therapies.

The other aspect that I wanted to share with you, because this is part of what I, as a physician who teaches, repeat again and again in different contexts, whether it's web, radio, print, television or lectures to physicians, is the numbers that we're dealing with, these treatment targets, these goals of therapy for all these different domains—blood pressure, cholesterol, sugar, height,

weight—are changing and there are particular nuances to them.

For example, we used to think—and all my physician colleagues will attest to this—that the number 140 over 90 was the official blood pressure; anything below that was okay. That was the treatment target ceiling. But we know now that that target was too lax. We have now a new speed limit in town. It is now 130 over 80. I remind myself and my colleagues and others that that is actually the upper ceiling of normal. Actual safe measures are even below that. Of course, that's an extraordinary challenge, because, as you'll know, two million Ontarians have diagnosable high blood pressure—hypertension—as I speak right now. One of the big problems is that only about half of them actually know it, only about half of them actually have it officially diagnosed—they know it—and only a subset of those are receiving appropriate therapies and so on. So these numbers are important; these numbers matter. Whether you're on this side or that side of these treatment targets, it affects your risk for heart attack, for stroke, for kidney failure and beyond.

Similar numbers can be repeated with regard to cholesterol. The numbers, again, are being tightened. The evil or bad or sticky or disease-causing cholesterol—the LDL cholesterol—for example, we as doctors are now treating to much lower levels. So if you are that multi-risk-factor patient—over 40, overweight, high blood pressure, with diabetes—we are obligated, as good therapeutic practitioners, to attempt to get you to much lower levels than we used to know before and that we used to treat. You'll appreciate that cholesterol, like sugar, can actually be measured by droplet blood testing. You don't always have to go to a medical doctor or a laboratory to get these measured.

Similar claims and opportunities exist in all these different areas: waist circumference, glucose. Ultimately, together, this is part of the package deal, a part of the various factors that go into the makeup of very important, explosive issues—the cardiometabolic syndrome and an individual's risk for heart attack, stroke and kidney failure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Aren't statistics a wonderful thing? I want to congratulate my friend from Etobicoke North on bringing this forward. In a perfect world, we would all know these statistics. The first thing I'll tell you is, sadly, I know most of mine. Knowing blood pressure and knowing that it's low is a good thing; knowing cholesterol and knowing that it's high is a bad thing. Nobody can really argue with that. I think it's appropriate that everyone know the numbers that are connected with their medical condition.

Having said that, there are some numbers that we have to deal with in the province of Ontario that pertain to medical conditions that very much enter into this debate. One of them is that one million people in Ontario don't have access to physicians to get these numbers. I think that's a very salient point to bring into this debate. Of those one million people, about 100,000 are children. So all of these people are without physicians. They can't know their blood pressure and they can't know their cholesterol and they can't know their blood sugar unless, perhaps, they go to the community clinic or they go to the hospital and get these taken as a matter of routine or maybe, even worse, during an emergency—numbers, as well, such as people, we've heard as recently as this morning, dying in long-term-care facilities because the government has not taken care of business in terms of giving them the time that's required, and, as mentioned again this morning, without the implementation of something as important as Bill 140, passed by the government last year but not fully implemented.

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No one can argue with the member's resolution. I support it. No one can argue with getting information that pertains to his health. But how do you know the numbers if you can't get to the source whence those numbers come?

The member has mentioned that he himself is a physician and that his colleague, our colleague, from Oak Ridges–Markham is a physician as well. Two physicians here in the Legislature—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Shurman: —another one as well; thank you for pointing that out—while this province, in the most recent estimates that I've read, demonstrates that it's lacking approximately 2,000 physicians to address the shortage that I've already outlined in terms of a million-plus people not being capable of going to see a doctor, having, in fact, when a doctor says, "I'm open to new patients," to go through an interview process in order to find out if they qualify.

Another number that has to be considered in this process is exemplified by my own community of Thornhill, which happens to have in its midst, amongst many other qualified communities, a community of Russian doctors who cannot practise in our environment—not because they haven't passed council exams; not because they aren't qualified.

I'll tell you two stories. These were people who visited me in my office and said, "What can I do?" In talking to HealthForceOntario and talking to the college of physicians and surgeons, I became familiar with the process. There's so much we could do and so much that we're not doing. Right now, it stands in the hands of the health ministry to make the appropriate changes.

I remember specific examples of a pediatrician, a wonderful woman probably in her 40s, who came from what was the former Soviet Union. She said to me, "Mr. Shurman, I would be prepared to give up being a pediatrician and practise general medicine anywhere in Ontario that I am sent. I will go to Thunder Bay and I'll be a regular family doctor. Please tell me how I do it." There's nothing to tell her, because what's missing is residency spots for people who have passed the council exams to go through, and an entire international medical graduate program that doesn't support the adherence of

new physicians and the ability to address this significant shortage.

Another example—and this one really weighed heavily on me; I can remember the details as I speak today—was another Russian-trained physician who by trade was a specialist in spinal surgery, something we could surely use in the province of Ontario, as well as operating in a military theatre, as well as operating in sparsely populated areas. Could we use that? Apparently not. He couldn't find a residency spot. So what did he do? He called the Canadian military and said, "I'm prepared to go to Afghanistan because I want to practise my craft. I want to practise my profession." "No, you can't go to Afghanistan. We only take Canadian physicians," was the answer he got. We're trying very hard to address this.

I know I'm straying a little bit from the nature of the resolution, but it all fits in because at the end of the day, if you don't give people access to physicians, you can't get the statistics that this resolution calls upon all people of Ontario to know.

The member from Etobicoke North is quite right: These are statistics that we really need to know so that we can adjust our lifestyles and make ourselves more healthy as a society. But we can't do that unless we do all of these other things, because that's how things fall into place.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Dr. Qaadri has moved, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario use all avenues to help people learn about their vital, medically significant numbers, including blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, waist circumference, height, weight and body mass index."

The frustration with this resolution is: Is there anyone here who will stand up and say, "I'm against good health"? "Am I against anyone not knowing what their vital health statistics are?"

It's like a number of other resolutions and private members' bills that come before us that are well-intentioned but frankly lack great substance or direction. Anyone who would be running the Ministry of Health Promotion would already be looking at something like this, would be talking to nurses and doctors about making sure that people were well educated.

I think it speaks very profoundly to the lack of activity on the part of this government, and frankly the lack of opportunities for people on the backbench of the Liberal Party to do things that are of interest and of consequence. If the member had brought forward a bill talking about a restructuring of the health care system, to dramatically increase the use of nurse practitioners, to address the whole question of determinants of health, to talk about the larger issues that have to be resolved if you want to have a functioning health care system, we would have far more to dine on and far more to discuss.

I should say that just like I am in favour of freedom and democracy and I would vote in favour of a resolution for freedom and democracy, then I will probably be supporting this motion as well. But I have to make a few comments in the course of my few minutes, because I believe that you can look at all kinds of problems in a variety of ways. You can look at problems and resolve them in a way that actually, fundamentally, comes to grips with an issue or you can put a band-aid on. You can do something that is cosmetic; you can do something that's substantive.

The first thing I want to say about this resolution—if this goes forward and if the Ministry of Health Promotion and the minister take note of it—is that they don't use doctors for this. It's a good thing, but a doctor with years of training would be far better used doing more complex diagnosis than this. We have nurse practitioners and nurses who could go through this with people, or health promotion specialists who could talk about this and who are not trained to do complex diagnosis. The first thing is, if you're going to go ahead with this, that's where you should be allocating your resources.

We would do well, if we were to go forward with such a resolution, to see that our community health centres were properly funded and that we had far more of them, so that when people go for that sort of health service, they are dealing with a range of practitioners who have a range of training, so that they get the appropriate person talking to them. That makes sense to me.

Far more fundamental is the whole question of this resolution as opposed to taking on the determinants of health. A number of years ago I read a book by Laurie Garrett with a terrible title, The Coming Plague, but a very substantial book on public health issues in the 20th century and the control of communicable diseases, the spread of communicable diseases, the interaction between environmental factors—deforestation—and the emergence of new diseases in our society.

One of the things she touched on was the prevalence, the incidence of tuberculosis in South Africa. It was quite extraordinary, because any public health practitioner could say to you very quickly that the reason tuberculosis spread with such rapidity, such rapacity, was in part related to the housing crisis in South Africa. People were jammed into huts and shacks, jammed into barracks. They breathed each other's breath, every hour of the day. So in situations where people were not fed well, where they were under stress on a constant basis, where they were put together essentially as units for breeding tuberculosis bacillus, no one should be surprised that they had a raging tuberculosis problem.

When my colleague, the member from Parkdale–High Park, questions the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing about the fact that the money has not gone into housing in this province, has not gone into housing for the poorest in this province, has not gone in in a situation where the waiting lists for affordable housing grow year after year, my colleague is speaking to a fundamental determinant of health and a fundamental barrier against the spread of communicable disease. That issue is not being addressed. If this resolution talked about that determinant of health, essentially pulling away the kindling so that the fire didn't get a chance to start, then

this would be a far more consequential resolution, but that determinant of health is not addressed.

1520

About two years ago, I went to Hellenic Home for the Aged. My colleague Sophie Aggelonitis from Hamilton Mountain is familiar with Hellenic Home for the Aged here in Toronto—a great institution, good people who have organized it. There's a doctor, Dr. Oreopoulos, who has been a central person in that whole process. I had the opportunity to walk with him two years ago as we went I don't know how many blocks—we went around a fair number—and we talked about diabetes and the rise in demand for dialysis, the impact on people of the obesity epidemic. He was very articulate and very worried because he saw this huge cohort of people affected by type 2 diabetes who were making these tremendous demands on the health care system. That kind of problem is not going to be solved by telling people about their body mass index.

A very simple public health measure, keeping swimming pools open in the schools in Toronto, and beyond that, putting funding into schools all over this province so more young people have more opportunities for physical education, would be of great consequence when it comes to early-onset obesity and all of the diseases that flow from that and all the expenses that flow from that.

When I was out in front of this Legislature a few weeks ago, there was a demonstration by parents and students asking for money for the pools. Those students and parents didn't understand the funding system. Somehow they thought the city of Toronto or the Toronto District School Board raised the taxes and made the spending decisions. In fact, the funding formula is set by the province. The envelopes are set out by the province setting out what can be spent, what is available for spending. Those powers in the hands of this government were ultimately the powers that determined whether the pools would be open or not, whether young people would have an opportunity or not to get fit. Those are the things that have to happen. The determinants of health have to be addressed. The opportunities for fitness have to be there, not just talked about. Talking about the indications of health at the end of the process is not adequate to keep a population healthy.

The next thing I want to talk about is the relationship between income and health. Just before this debate began, I took a look at Health Canada's website. They have a list of about 12 determinants of health. There are a variety of things that touch on your ability to be healthy, on the ability of a population to be healthy. But a key thing on their website, even in Stephen Harper's Canada, was the indication that where you have a relatively well-off population and greater income equality, you have greater health.

It's been interesting to me to follow the Toronto Star and academic commentators who have looked at the Statistics Canada material that's come out in the last while about the stagnation of incomes for middle-income Canadians and the dire reality for low-income Canadians. It's quite correct what has been reported by academics and commented on by the Toronto Star, that in fact union certification and the decline of union certification has been damaging the middle class in this province and this country. There's no question that when people are unionized, when they are certified, they have the opportunity to negotiate with employers and increase their share of the wealth they generate. So if we want a healthy population, we need not only a wealthy society as a whole, but a society within which that wealth is shared equitably so that people can feed themselves well, clothe themselves well, house themselves well and, frankly, have greater control of their lives.

It was interesting, again, looking at the Health Canada stats and commentary, that one of the factors that's most predictive of ill health related to income is the inability to control stressful situations. So if you're poor and the stability of your housing is always in question, you are subject to fundamental stressors. If you're in a situation where you have an abusive employer and you don't have a method for addressing that, you are stressed. It affects your health. So when this government does not support union certification, card-based certification, when the Minister of Labour considers it far left—he even got a dart from the Toronto Star for that—you have to say this is a government that is not committed to the preservation of the middle class in this province. Because of that, it is also not committed to mass-based population health assurance, and it has to be. If we want to live good, healthy lives, then we only get that when all of us get to live good, healthy lives.

Mr. Kuldip Kular: I'm pleased and honoured to participate in the debate on the private member's resolution put forward by the esteemed colleague of ours, the honourable member from Etobicoke North. His resolution is, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario use all avenues to help people learn about their vital, medically significant numbers, including blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, waist circumference, height, weight and body mass index."

Why is it so important? Why is it so necessary to know these vital numbers? The member from Etobicoke North has already given the importance of knowing your blood pressure. I'm not going to talk about all those numbers, but I'm going to take some of them: why it's important to know your weight, why it's important to know your height and why it's important to know your waist circumference. If you know your weight, and if you know your height, that's how you will be able to find out what your body mass index is. When you use the body mass index, as well as waist circumference, that helps you to identify if you are at any increased risk of developing health problems, whether it's chronic diseases or diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, osteoporosis or certain kinds of cancer; that helps us to find out. If people are able to understand and able to remember and have the awareness of knowing these vital signs which are medically significant, they should be able to find out. For example,

your body mass index helps to categorize you, whether you are of normal weight, underweight, overweight or grossly obese. That's how it helps you.

I'm proud to say that under the leadership of our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, a lot of our budget goes into health care delivery. What he has been doing in the last three or four years with our health care delivery is transforming it from sick care to healthy care. Under his leadership, we have better accessibility to doctors and better accessibility to nurses. During the last budget, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care allocated to bring in more nurse practitioners.

1530

If the people of this province understand and remember these vital, medically significant numbers, they will be able to help the health care providers, whether it's a physician, a nurse practitioner, a dietitian or a nutritionist, who can be part of the teamwork. That's why more and more physicians are realizing that it's very important to practise preventive medicine. Therefore, knowing your vital and medically significant numbers is a way to actively involve people in their health care, and it makes it medically more proficient. It becomes teamwork. If people understand these numbers, they will be able to participate in their health care. To keep health care delivery sustainable budget-wise in this province, we have to change our way of looking at things. People have to start understanding how much it costs to look after their health. Once they start to know the numbers, it will be very important; everybody will be participating in the health care delivery for all Ontarians.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to offer a few comments with respect to the private member's resolution brought forward by the member from Etobicoke North. I share the frustration with several of the other speakers here this afternoon who've indicated, "Who wouldn't agree with a resolution that promotes good health? Who wouldn't agree with a resolution that's going to make sure that people are more aware of the elements of physical fitness: waist circumference, cholesterol, blood sugar and so on?" Of course we all agree with that.

I, along with many other members, was brought up in a household where that was very important. My father was at one point in his career a physical education teacher, so we were all brought up with an awareness of health and vitality and the importance of living a healthy, active lifestyle. Certainly I try to do that with my three sons as well, now that they're teenagers, keeping them involved in sports and keeping them out of other kinds of trouble too in the course of that. That certainly is very important. But I think when you start talking about building awareness of physical fitness and good health, you also have to be prepared to do something about it, to promote physical fitness.

I'd like to look at a couple of things, if I might, such as opportunities this government has had to promote physical fitness and good health and vitality, but has failed to do so. One example is delisting certain health care treatments from OHIP, physiotherapy being one of them—helping people who have been injured to get back into good shape, to get back into their fitness routines and so on. That's something they could look at, they could deal with, but they've chosen not to.

Let's look at ODSP, Ontario disability support payments, to people who are disabled. Let's look at how much money these people receive per month. If you're not living in a rent-geared-to-income apartment or townhouse, you have very little money left at the end of the month to feed yourself properly. I think we've all had experiences where people have come into our community offices. I had one gentleman who came in to see me shortly after I was elected who was blind. He had a guide dog—his dog was his window to the outside world—and he told me that at the end of the month he actually had to go to a food bank to feed himself so he could buy food for his dog. That's just not right, not in the province of Ontario.

We also have a situation where people who are on ODSP, if they have a special need—if they are diabetic, for example, and need to have a special dietary allowance—are forced to file reams of applications and fight to get an extra $10 or $20 a month, whatever it is. It's a pittance, really. It's degrading, it's humiliating and it shouldn't happen here. We should be looking at situations where we can deal with this proactively. Let's look at it in a different way. Why don't we start taking a look at paying people a proper amount so they can eat properly and not subject them to this on a monthly basis; the same thing for people who are receiving social assistance.

Again, I had a woman who was very hard-working, who raised her four children on her own because her husband had serious mental health problems. She was the sole breadwinner in the family. She told me that she finally got herself to a place where she was actually able to buy fresh food for her children because she educated herself and got a job. What happened? They clawed back and quadrupled the amount of rent she had to pay every month. She was in tears. She said, "I can't get ahead because of the policies of this government."

It could be changed so easily. Just give people a little bit more time to get on their feet so they can get back on track. But they can't feed their children properly. They have to feed their children cheap, carbohydrate-based foods. They can't afford fresh fruits and vegetables. Those are the children who are suffering, who are having problems with obesity, diabetes and all the other health problems attendant with that.

The other area I have mentioned in this House before, and do want to mention again, is the whole issue of underfunding for health care in the GTA/905 areas and in particular in my own Durham region. We have raised—in fact, I have raised a private member's resolution about this in the past—that we need to ensure that all parts of Ontario are equally funded for health care, according to their needs. That's not happening in Durham. We're underfunded by over $200 per person compared to the

provincial average in Ontario. I know that my colleagues the members for Thornhill, Halton and Newmarket–Aurora are in the same situation. We're all in the same situation. We are in rapidly growing areas, we have people who are in need who can't find family doctors, who don't have adequate medical facilities, not just in terms of hospital care but in terms of the other services that go along with it: children's treatment centres, mental health facilities.

We have a situation right now where we're seeing, because of the requirement to balance budgets, which I don't disagree with—in this particular case, they haven't taken a look at allocating funding for high-growth areas and are requiring cutbacks in mental health in-patient beds, which, in my view, would be unnecessary if the proper formula were applied so that, first of all, the area is funded up to the provincial average, using these dollars that have been allocated for high-growth areas, where it wouldn't be necessary to cut what I believe are core medical services in our areas in many people's view. That has certainly been borne out by some of the psychiatrists in our area, who are adamant that mental health care in our area is going to suffer if those in-patient beds are moved as a result of these changes.

In summary, there are lots of things that can be looked at by this government that would promote health, wellness and well-being and, with a few simple tweaks and not a huge amount of money, could improve health care for all Ontarians.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm sure it is no surprise that I rise to support my colleague from Etobicoke North's excellent resolution and to speak following another esteemed colleague, the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton. We are three physicians in this House, and we all support this resolution. We know that these vital numbers have great significance and, in fact, can be modified through things like physical activity, diet and maintaining appropriate body weight. We know that these factors are extremely important in terms of preventing cardiovascular disease, many other chronic diseases and even 30% to 40% of all cancers.

I see this resolution as a very useful adjunct to the work that is being done currently in the Ministry of Health Promotion: the type of public education, legislation such as the Smoke Free Ontario Act and, of course, all the great initiatives of this government. Some colleagues here have referred to the social determinants of health, so they must be extremely pleased, as I am, about our government's initiative in terms of a poverty reduction plan; there is no question that income does influence health. They must also be very pleased that we are expanding the number of community health centres.

1540

But this particular resolution is a way of personalizing all that healthy public policy. This morning, I went on the heart and stroke website. I'm sure the member for Toronto–Danforth will be very relieved to know that he will be able to do a risk assessment himself. This does not require a physician, and it does not require a nurse. It is taking some personal responsibility to look at those risk factors that you may be able to modify yourself.

We know that with cardiovascular disease and diabetes there are many genetic factors that we cannot modify. However, there are many things we can change, such as smoking and diet, salt intake, intake of fatty fried foods, alcohol and the relationship of stress. So very simply—it takes about 10 minutes on the heart and stroke website—you can you assess your personal risk factors.

One of the things you can do extremely easily is measure your waist circumference. I hope that all members of this House will go and get their tape measures this evening. I recommend the cloth variety; I would not try the metallic one. The website actually shows you exactly how to measure your waist circumference so you don't cheat.

In fact, some very interesting numbers are shown on the website. If your waist circumference is over 32 inches, you are at high risk for cardiovascular disease if are you a Chinese or a South Asian woman. If your waist circumference is over 35 inches, you are at high risk if you are a woman or if you're a Chinese or South Asian male. Over 40 inches—and as I look around this chamber, I detect there may be some of the gentlemen in the crowd over 40 inches—everyone is at risk.

Obviously, on this website, there are also some very good tips as to how you can take some personal responsibility to modify your personal risk factors. There are ways of setting goals, realistic goals, that you'll be able to meet and a number of tips on how to make behaviour change easier.

As we all know, this is a challenge. In fact, members on this side of the House have often talked about going for a brisk walk around Queen's Park Circle whenever we are released from this place. Unfortunately, we have yet to actually achieve that. So we know that behaviour changes are difficult.

What this resolution does is bring public awareness to individuals about what they can do in terms of modifying their risk factors. Of course, it is simply one piece of a big puzzle, which is how to ensure that Ontarians are as healthy as possible. There's no reservation in my mind that we should all support this resolution. I congratulate my colleague for bringing it forth.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Qaadri, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Of course, I'd like to thank my colleagues, particularly my physician parliamentarian colleagues in my caucus, Dr. Kuldip Kular of Bramalea–Gore–Malton and Dr. Helena Jaczek, Oak Ridges–Markham, not only for their important support but also for taking some of these general principles and offering some personal remarks, particularly with reference to risk assessment, especially some of the ethnocultural overlay.

I'd also like to thank my colleague from the PC side, Mr. Shurman of Thornhill, for his thoughtful and substantive illustration of other important numbers. I'd like to thank my colleague from the NDP for his review of sociology and his just detectable support of this reso-

lution. I would humbly submit, sir, that initiatives that change the world often begin as ideas. I'd also like to thank my PC colleague for Whitby–Oshawa, Christine Elliott, for the important issues she raised in terms of delisting, the dignity for diabetics, as well as funding issues, of course things that we struggle with on an ongoing basis.

With reference to these particular numbers—of course, there's the humour that some individuals seem to self-attribute, whether we're chatting about waist circumference or weight measurements and so on—I just have to re-emphasize. These numbers are vitally significant. These numbers are deadly significant. These numbers are, for the largest part—probably the majority—of Ontarians unknown to them. We, of course, as physicians, inherit the complications, the consequences—the phone calls, by the way, to the surviving members of the family, because it is these types of numbers that are not broadly appreciated, acted upon and treated to target. The risk reduction of these aspects that I'm chatting about—cardiometabolic syndrome, cardiovascular risk factors, heart disease, stroke, angina and kidney failure—are generally unknown, underappreciated and undermanaged.

I appreciate all the members of this House supporting this resolution, and certainly for it to be mobilized elsewhere in the corridors of this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

We will deal with the first ballot item, number 19, standing in the name of Mr. Lalonde.

PROVINCIAL PARKS AND MAJOR PROVINCIAL TOURIST ATTRACTIONS SIGN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR L'ÉRECTION DE PANNEAUX DANS LES PARCS PROVINCIAUX ET À L'EMPLACEMENT D'IMPORTANTES ATTRACTIONS TOURISTIQUES PROVINCIALES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Lalonde has moved second reading of Bill 21, An Act to require bilingual signs in provincial parks, parks under the control of the Niagara Parks Commission and at major provincial tourist attractions. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to the standing orders, this bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I would like to have this bill referred to the general government standing committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Agreed? Agreed. The bill is referred.

We will now deal with ballot item number 20, standing in the name of Mr. Levac.

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE JOUR COMMÉMORATIF DE L'HOLODOMOR

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Levac has moved second reading of Bill 61, An Act to proclaim Holodomor Memorial Day. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Dave Levac: Mr. Speaker, I wish that this bill would be sent to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, at the pleasure of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Agreed? Agreed.

We will now deal with the final ballot item, number 21.

HEALTH PROMOTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Qaadri has moved private member's resolution number 33. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

I declare that the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Agreed to.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: On a point of order, Speaker: I'd—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It's not a bill. You won.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INVESTING IN ONTARIO ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 PERMETTANT D'INVESTIR DANS L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 7, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 35, Loi autorisant le ministre des Finances à faire des versements aux bénéficiaires admissibles sur les crédits affectés par la Législature et modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la transparence et la responsabilité financières, la Loi sur le ministère du Trésor et de l'Économie et la Loi de 1991 sur le Conseil du Trésor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Debate? The honourable member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I am standing here in—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: I ask the government's attention, if they want to listen to the bill, because what the government did, which I want to start with, was one of the most unfair practices I have ever seen since I have been a member in this House. The government did not move a bill of closure, which would have allowed each party an opportunity to speak to the bill; they moved a motion that we have two hours of debate. Then they went off and did one hour of debate themselves, the Conservatives took 45 minutes of the debate, there was some wrangling, and it left me with 10 minutes. I have to say that I find this an appalling, appalling practice—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: —I'm told that I've got nine now—and, in my view, an abuse of the process of this House. I cannot believe for a moment that that was the intent, but they went ahead and did it anyway, knowing full well that there would be no opportunity for me to debate this bill other than for some nine minutes.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: If somebody wants to move that, I wouldn't object.

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I agree with the member's point that he's made. I think we should have had fulsome debate. If the member has something he wants to share with other members in the House here, I know that my colleagues in the official opposition—I'd like to move unanimous consent to give the member—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll deal with the point of order first, and I would say that it really wasn't a point of order. If you'd like to do something else, go ahead.

1550

Mr. Frank Klees: I'd like to move unanimous consent to give the member an additional 60 minutes of debate on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I hear noes.

The honourable member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I expected to get that from the government bench. It shows the real idea they have around democracy and stifling debate, especially from the third party. I find it reprehensible. This bill is reprehensible. What this government is trying to do is reprehensible as well.

The Auditor General came before and wrote a letter to the Chair of the committee in which he said two things. I've only got nine minutes, so here they go:

"In conclusion, I believe section 4 and subsection 5(2) of Bill 35 should be deleted to avoid the potential for conflicting requirements in how a transaction is to be accounted for in the province's financial statements.

"I would be pleased to appear before the committee to discuss this and to answer any questions if the committee members feel this would be helpful in their review of Bill 35."

I moved a motion in committee to ask that the Auditor General come forward even for a few brief moments to describe why this bill might contravene his duty to this Legislature, and I was denied by the committee when every single Liberal member on the committee voted not to hear the Auditor General, who is a servant of this Legislature. Every single member said no to hearing why the bill may not be legal.

Then they went on, on this horrendous little bill, which they say is the transparency act, to be anything but transparent. In frustration, towards the end of the committee, I moved a motion to ask that the name of the bill be changed to the Slush Fund Protection Act, 2008, and, probably quite rightly, the Chair said that it was not. He quoted Montpetit and said it was frivolous and vexatious and designed to put the bill into disrepute. I have to agree with him. The bill deserves to be in disrepute. The bill ought not to be before this House. It ought not to be rammed through in the way that this government chooses to ram it through.

You know, we tried to move some motions to make sure that the bill did what the government claims. The government claims this is a municipal bill that's going to help municipalities. So I moved a little tiny motion. I still, for the life of me, can't believe the government voted it down, every single member. The motion was to include the word "municipality" within the body of the bill. You'd think that that was a radical thing. If it was supposed to be for municipalities, don't you think the bill should state so? Well, no. Every single member voted it down.

I suggested to the government, and I suggested before, if they really want to help municipalities, they have to end the download. They have to upload the download. They have to put some monies in the budget. They can't be budgeting at the end of the year, if there's a few dollars here left over, that, "Maybe we'll be able to do some finagling. We'll tell the auditor to turn a blind eye. We'll tell the auditor not to look at what is necessary. We'll tell the auditor that we're going to give it out and you're never going to have any audit control over it."

I said, if you're really serious, put the word "municipality" in it. If you're even more serious, put the money into the budget in the first place. There is a $100-billion deficit in this province municipally, across the province, monies that the municipalities desperately need. This is a sop. This is a total sop, if and when this bill passes, because it's only valid for the first year of the bill that municipalities would even be eligible.

I moved a second amendment, and that was the amendment to insist that municipalities are the only groups that can receive the money, because, you see, next year anybody can get the money. Anybody the government chooses can get the money. Cricket clubs can get the money. All the things that happened in the last Parliament, handing out and doling out to your friends, is all going to be legal if this bill is passed.

The government sat there and voted for all of it and said, "That's fine," and they made all the provisions so

that the auditor can't even go in and investigate it. I can't believe what they did. And they all have the straight face, the temerity, the unmitigated gall, to stand here and say it's for municipalities. It isn't. It's to reward their friends and to ensure that the auditor can't even audit the books at the end of the year.

I moved another amendment. I thought, "My God, we've got to do something to stop this." I moved an amendment that the municipalities or the cricket clubs or whoever was getting the money had to make an application, because you remember last time that there were not even any applications. So I said, "If they're going to get some of this money, they have to be told how much there is in the pot, and they have to make an application."

But no, the five members on the committee voted that down so you don't even need to make an application. I was appalled. I'm shocked and appalled. I sat here during the last session, when they took up all the time talking about their wonderful bill, listening to what was really going on. Not one of them will admit that you don't even need to make an application to get this money, whether you're a municipality or a cricket club or a member of the Liberal Party hiding under the rubric, or some rug somewhere, trying to pretend you're really going to do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much time I've got. I'm speaking as fast as I can.

We asked for an open process. We asked that if money is to be given out, if the taxpayers' money is to be used, then the taxpayers should have some way of watching where that money flows, that the auditor in his wisdom and in the wisdom of his staff can take a look at the money and make sure that there is an application process, make sure that it's going to a recognized municipality or other agency which is set out in the regulations—which is not done. We asked, in the end, to do exactly what the auditor said. The auditor said that he wanted section 4 and subsection 5(2) of Bill 35 deleted.

We moved, along with my colleague from the Conservative Party—I've got two minutes—that those sections be deleted. Of course, I was ruled out of order by the committee Chair: "If you don't like these, vote against it." Well, of course I voted against it. I did exactly what the servant to this Legislature said we should do in order to protect the fiscal integrity of this House. Of course, five Liberal members voted to retain it.

In the end, I have to tell you, I was so extremely frustrated. From the inception of this bill, from the day that the minister paraded in Mayor McCallion and others to say the wonder of the bill, to the day we got the bill and found out it didn't do anything when he had promised municipal leaders, to the day that we started to debate this bill, to the closure that keeps the New Democrats out of the debate, all of this has been one horrendous experience.

It is a crying shame that Liberals are going to stand there one by one, mark my words, and vote for such a horrendous piece of legislation. I am ashamed for each and every one of them and for what they've done. I hope some day that the auditor is going to be able to come in and look at it in spite of your bill and call it for what it is: a legalized slush fund.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 22, 2008, I am now required to put the question.

On May 7, 2008, Mr. Caplan moved third reading of Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1558 to 1559.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. Pursuant to standing order 28(h), Mr. Duncan has requested the deferral of Bill 35. This bill is deferred until Monday, May 12, 2008.

Third reading vote deferred.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those in favour? Agreed? Agreed.

This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock, Monday, May 12.

The House adjourned at 1600.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Broten, Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, government House leader / ministre des Affaires autochtones, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
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Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the committee of the whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (L)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

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Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (L)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Tourism / ministre du Tourisme
Gélinas, France (ND)	Nickel Belt	
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	
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Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	
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Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
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Monday 12 May 2008

Lundi 12 mai 2008

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 12 May 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 12 mai 2008

The House met at 0900.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Mr. Michael Prue: On the last occasion, I had given almost all of my speech, so I just want to reiterate today that, after much deliberation, I will be supporting the bill, although I wish—I wish—the government had done what was necessary to make two minor amendments, one of which was proposed by the Conservative Party, which would have protected victims of incest and rape from having their names disclosed. The second minor amendment which could or should be made some time in the future is to allow people who have been adopted to make application to determine whether or not their biological parent or parents have died, because there are some difficulties if someone dies outside the jurisdiction. I trust that at some future time both of these will see the light of day. But notwithstanding that, I will be supporting the bill, because it has taken far too long for it to get to this stage.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: There is a short amount of time left to discuss Bill 12. I guess what I have to say, as a new member to this House, is that Bill 12 has been an education for me. We had an opportunity collectively, as legislators, to make some positive changes with Bill 12. The amendment that was brought forward by my PC colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, while it was a PC amendment, to be sure, was actually in the original bill that we are amending. How unfortunate: I guess it is a bit of an education for me that we can never get rid of our partisan stripes, even when it means protecting Ontario's most vulnerable. As we all know, the amendment would have ensured that children who are abused, removed from the home and subsequently adopted would be automatically protected from having their personal information disclosed to the abuser without their consent. I underline "without their consent," because ultimately this is about protecting victims of abuse, and the Liberal government has chosen to ignore that amendment. I think it's an unfortunate day and an unfortunate way to end the debate on Bill 12.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

There being none, Mr. Milloy has moved time allocation on Bill 12. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 0906 to 0907.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The vote is deferred until deferred votes today.

Vote deferred.

PROVINCIAL ANIMAL WELFARE ACT, 2008

LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2008 SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE DES ANIMAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 6, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to speak about animal welfare. It's in part, at least, a pleasure to speak to this bill. I wish, in fact, it was a greater pleasure, because there are some problems. I'll go into the problems.

First I wanted to share with the House my introduction to the Toronto Humane Society, that venerable Ontario and Toronto institution—because they don't just handle animals from the Toronto region. This is an institution that's threatened by a very strange section in this bill, which is section 6. In section 6, this Bill 50 takes a swipe at the Toronto Humane Society—in fact, about 235 animal welfare societies across the province. Anyone who uses the word "humane" will cease to be able to use the word "humane" because of section 6. I rise in part in defence of the Toronto Humane Society, and here's why.

The why's name was Chuffy. Chuffy was my first dog. We grew up on Bedford Road in Toronto, and Chuffy was one of those venerable Toronto dogs. Chuffy came from the humane society, although Chuffy was a pure-bred cocker spaniel. There was a lot of the street in Chuffy. Chuffy would not be contained by four walls, ever. We tried to keep him in the yard, but he'd always find a way out, either burrowing under or around, or somehow. So one would often see Chuffy walking around the streets of Toronto. In fact, as Chuffy aged—Chuffy

lived to be 16 years old—Chuffy was noted for crossing all four lanes of Bloor Street at the corner of Bedford and Bloor, in front of the Varsity Stadium, at a very, very slow pace. One could see all four lanes of traffic screeching to a halt just to let Chuffy by.

Chuffy would find himself all over the GTA at various times, and at various times we, as Chuffy's family, would get a call from the humane society saying, "Please come and pick up your dog," which we would. So the Toronto Humane Society, in my family, came to be known as Chuffy's hotel, and we would say, "Chuffy's at the hotel again," and there we would be, going to pick up this venerable old dog. So it's in honour of Chuffy's hotel that I stand today.

Chuffy's hotel, the humane society—which serves so well and so frequently, and has served, I might add, for over 120 years in the city of Toronto—is under threat because of this silly section 6. One wonders why this section is even in this bill.

I'm going to read a letter from the president of the Toronto Humane Society, Tim Trow, to Minister Bartolucci.

"We write to ask you to remove section 6 from Bill 50. Section 6 provides that community-built shelters that either don't want to be affiliates of the Ontario SPCA, or shelters that the Ontario SPCA itself does not want as affiliates, will be stripped automatically of their names by the Legislature.

"Historically in Ontario, the many voices of the province's animal welfare movement have been its strength. If the result of Bill 50 is but one voice, Bill 50 will have stifled debate and diversity and will have weakened what has been built up in communities over generations.

"Bill 50's role for the Ontario SPCA appears to be one of insurmountable conflict of interest, because the Ontario SPCA will become both regulator and fundraising competitor to its 32 affiliates.

"In addition, Ontario's animal welfare movement is wider than the Ontario SPCA or its affiliates. Bill 50 will instantly, upon enactment, strip the names and identities of other charities amongst the 235 Ontario animal protection charities registered with the Canada Revenue Agency.

"Bill 50 provides for no decision-making process and no appeal to the courts. It provides no explanation as to why it is necessary for the Legislature to take away the identities of any charities.

"Sanctions against holding out or infringing a corporate name already exist in Ontario law. In the case of the Toronto Humane Society, there could be no confusion because there is no similarity between 'the Toronto Humane Society' and the 'Ontario SPCA.'"

One might make a note at this point—I'll continue reading the whole text of this letter—that the Toronto Humane Society has a 6% kill rate. It's a kind of grim term, but a term that has meaning; it means that only 6% of the animals that are taken in to the humane society are actually put down, whereas the Ontario SPCA has a kill rate of 51%. I think that any citizens out there concerned about animal welfare would be shocked by the difference. The fact that this legislation is giving the nod to the OSPCA over the Toronto Humane Society seems to indicate that they think a 51% kill rate is all right.

"The Toronto Humane Society is a well-known Ontario landmark, a hospital and shelter, caring for both wild and domestic animals. We employ 150 caregivers, and, at any time, 500 volunteers provide recuperative or palliative care as foster parents, feed orphan kittens in the nursery, groom cats, or walk dogs."

"We serve province-wide, one-third of our clients coming to us from beyond our Toronto area.

"The Toronto Humane Society has grown and prospered since 1887 because of the generous support of financial contributors and members. We do not receive, and have never received, government funding or funding from the Ontario SPCA"—important, particularly for taxpayers in this province.

"Our name is how we have been identified for 121 years. It has been entrusted to us by successive provincial governments and it represents the goodwill and trust of generations.

"Our name is how we speak to supporters and donors, and it is how they identify us in their wills or in other giving. It is how volunteers and animal caregivers find us and it is how clients access our services—rescuing animals, reuniting lost animals, saving injured wildlife, providing veterinary care, extending shelter and providing homes."

"Take away our name and identity and you jeopardize our ability to provide essential animal care to citizens when they are desperate and in need.

"Please remove section 6 from Bill 50.

"Yours truly,

"Tim Trow, president."

I want to say as well that the writers of some of the e-mails I've received on Bill 50 seem to think that this has something in common with a previous private member's bill, Bill 154, which had to do with the licensing and the oversight of private zoos, of roadside zoos, as they're called.

What is somewhat shameful on this government's behalf is that what was a wonderful bill by the member from Willowdale protecting exotic animals has not only not morphed into Bill 50 and has not been taken on by the cabinet and Dalton McGuinty but has been left aside at the roadside, so to speak. In fact, in this new bill there is no protection for exotic animals or roadside zoo animals unless they're domestic animals. They are not covered or protected by this bill at all. So what animal welfare activists have thought in this province, that Bill 154 was going to be a component part of Bill 50, has not only not been realized but has been completely and utterly ignored.

What is quite frightening here is a general trend by this government, and in particular the cabinet—because we know that all power issues from the Premier here, Dalton McGuinty—to override private members' bills, to ignore private members' bills, even from their own back-

benchers. Even when their own backbenchers put forward bills that have phenomenal merit, this government overrides them, overlooks them and ignores them.

Here we have a very substantive private member's bill, Bill 154, that was purporting to look after exotic animals and licensed roadside zoos, and instead, what do we find in Bill 50? None of the above. There is no protection for exotic animals and no protection for roadside zoo denizens, none whatsoever, despite the fact Bill 154 had support from the president of the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums, who was enthusiastic about the promise to regulate roadside zoos.

One definitely feels for the member from Willowdale here and for any other backbencher in the Liberal caucus who decides they want to bring forward a bill of merit. The hope is, of course, that it comes and issues directly from the cabinet, but in these instances where members come up with excellent ideas and excellent legislation and are not only ignored, but in fact, one would say, insulted by the government bringing forward a bill that doesn't even acknowledge what their bill purported to do—this is the case with 154, that has morphed into Bill 50.

Other animals that are not looked after by this bill are animals that are on farms, or wild animals or research animals or any other animals that are so deemed by the cabinet. That seems like a great many animals indeed for an animal welfare bill. Let me talk about farm animals for a minute.

Farmers whose livelihood depends on their animals tend to look after their animals. But there's a particular classification of farm animals that aren't really owned by farmers. They're owned by what is certainly not well-named: gentlemen farmers. In one instance—and this was just a few years back—we had a case of 50 horses starved to death by one of these so-called gentlemen farmers. There was nothing gentlemanly about this individual, and there certainly wasn't anything farmer about him either: He was a lawyer. I suggested when I first made comments about this bill that if there were more farmers in this Legislature and fewer lawyers, maybe we would get a bill that looked after animals better than Bill 50 does. Here's an individual whose animals—the 50 horses—would not be covered by Bill 50. In fact, he would not be prosecuted by the terms of this bill. He would not be held to account by the terms of this bill. Again, there is a huge gap, a gaping hole in the provisions for animal welfare that this bill purports to do.

0920

I've already mentioned roadside zoos. Again, the ideology of this bill came out of that. I also want to say that there is another member here who really should be credited with some of the early work on animal welfare. The member from Eglinton–Lawrence brought in, away back in 2001, a private member's bill about puppy and cat mills. At that point, interestingly enough, the then Progressive Conservative government, and in particular Julia Munro from York–Simcoe, brought forward a bill as government that mirrored the bill brought forward by an opposition member at that time. One would hope that the McGuinty cabinet would do as much for their own members. In this instance, we did get a step forward, albeit a small step, for animal rights that looked at puppy and kitten mills across the province. So we've seen how it can work that an animal welfare bill by a private member, even an opposition member, can be taken up by a cabinet and can be made law in very short order and can do something to protect, in this case, the rights and welfare of animals and animal owners in this province.

I wanted to talk about three trends in short that I've noticed—since I've been a member in the House for only two years now—about private members' bills generally. That is this trend to give them no credence whatsoever by the McGuinty cabinet and by Dalton McGuinty himself. Over and over, we see in this House the good, solid legislative research work of private members being ignored. There is a long litany of the ignoring of private members' bills and private members' efforts.

In this case, as I've said already, the member from Willowdale had brought in an extremely valuable piece of legislation, one that I know we all received e-mails about. Stacks of petitions were read in this House to support this bill. Everybody agreed, including those in the industry, that roadside zoos and exotic animals needed protection, yet this bill was just allowed to die. In fact, when the new animal welfare bill came forward that could have included it, it did not.

That's only one example. There are many examples here. I know that the member from Niagara Falls brought in a bill on grandparents' rights. Again, for the third time, his bill was ignored by the McGuinty cabinet. Again, for the third time, a backbencher within his own caucus clearly did not have his voice heard by the cabinet, and clearly was not given the time of day. So many, many instances abound.

I certainly hope that in the future—I know that there are probably only a few weeks left of this legislative session—the McGuinty cabinet starts to look to their own backbenchers and starts to use their talents. I do remember Dalton McGuinty saying that he wanted to uphold the strengths of the individual MPP and give the individual MPP—the backbencher—more voice. Instead, we see what's happened is the individual MPP backbenchers being given even less voice than they were under the previous administration here.

The other tendency—and there are three tendencies of private members' bills in this House—is that the bill is spun one way to the press, and then when you actually read the bill, it says something quite different. The spin on Bill 50, of course, is that this is a huge step forward for animal welfare in this province, that this is going to make all the difference to animals. I've already outlined that there are many various categories of animals that are not even covered by this bill. In particular, Bill 154 is not reflected in this bill.

Even more to the point, in the middle of this bill, this egregious section 6 does something that no animal welfare activist in this province would ever want to see

happen: to strip the venerable institution of the Toronto Humane Society of its very existence and its very title, and another 235 animal welfare societies across the province. That is the purport of section 6. One wonders why it's stuck in the middle of an animal welfare bill. Why is it so important to the OSPCA and the Liberal cabinet that Toronto Humane Society lose "Humane" from its title? One wonders.

In my earlier comments on this bill, I suggested that one look at the political affiliations of the board of the OSPCA, because I can't imagine any other reason that this turf warfare would be carried on in the middle of an animal welfare bill that absolutely will not help animals; in fact, will hurt animals. Again, I cite the difference in the kill rate: 6% at the Toronto Humane Society, 51% at the OSPCA. Does OSPCA really want to dominate animal welfare in this province to this degree, and does the Liberal cabinet really want to help them?

We saw this in Bill 35, the infamous slush fund bill, purported to be a bill to help cities, municipalities and infrastructure; in fact, neither of those words, "infrastructure" and "municipalities," are mentioned in the bill. What Bill 35 does is justify slush funds, the ability of the government to give to non-profits as much money as it wants left over, over the subtotal of $600 million, to whoever it wants. We know what that looks like; we know why they didn't want the Auditor General speaking on that particular bill. We know why it flies in the face of accounting procedures, and yet they rammed that bill through. One wonders, when you look at Bill 50, if some of that slush fund money won't be flowing to the OSPCA. Clearly, there's a section in this bill that seems to indicate that they have the nod of the Liberal cabinet, and certainly the Toronto Humane Society does not—I must say, much to the chagrin and much to the horror of hundreds of people in this city. I've lost count of the number of e-mails I've received on that.

Finally—this is important—we have three tendencies of private members' bills in particular embodied in Bill 50: (1) a general trend to discount their own backbenchers' private members' bills, to disregard them, to ignore them, to ignore what's best and brightest in their own caucus; (2) to spin bills one way and then deliver a bill that says something very different entirely; and (3)—this is critical—that the bills don't have money backing them anyway. How in the world is Bill 50 going to be enforced if there isn't a line item in the budget for it, if there's no money to back these increased inspections and these increased enforcement? Is this just another instance—and I suspect and state that it probably is—of downloading yet more costs to municipalities, saddling them with more legislation that they have to enforce and not giving the money to enforce it? We can see the ramifications of that: blaming them when they're not enforced and shoving the blame away from where it definitely should reside, and that is in the sanctum sanctorum of the McGuinty government.

Just to summarize Bill 50: Will we support it? Absolutely, we'll support it, because an inch forward is still an inch, where animal welfare is concerned. Does this bill have major problems? Absolutely, it does. It deserves a good deal of committee time. There are gaping holes in this bill. There's that absolutely unwarranted, unwanted section 6, which, as I say, is a direct slap in the face of 235 welfare organizations across Ontario, particularly the Toronto Humane Society—Chuffy's hotel.

I'll end where I began, with just an homage to my dog, Chuffy, and to all the dogs and cats across this province who, if Bill 50 were to pass as written, would not have the home that they have now, the hotel that they have now, the Toronto Humane Society, but would be stripped of that right. If section 6 continues in Bill 50 and is not stricken at the committee level, you can bet that animal welfare will be set back and not put forward by Bill 50 in this province. I suggest that this bill go to committee, go there quickly and be given a very thorough reading, and that a very thorough consultation happen with, in particular, those members who have been left out of this discussion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I want to just take the two minutes that I have to respond to the member from Parkdale–High Park.

I have a history with the Ontario Humane Society. You may know or may not know that in 1984 I was appointed the interim chair of the Toronto Humane Society. The reason for that is that there was a huge discussion between the Toronto Humane Society and the city of Toronto, because the Toronto Humane Society had a contract to provide animal control. They had a direct conflict. You can't be in the welfare business and in the control business, because in the control business you bring in a very large number of animals and you ultimately have no choice but to dispose of them. When you use the figure of 6% for the humane society and 51% for the SPCA, the reason is that the Toronto Humane Society is no longer in the animal control business, and that is being run by a separate agency of the city of Toronto. The Toronto Humane Society does a wonderful job, but historically they've always had this internal conflict. The reason I was asked to go in and try to resolve it was because they literally had physical confrontations with each other, because there were those on the animal welfare side who felt, "How can we possibly be in the welfare business when in fact we are taking in animals that are strays that come to us and, because there such a huge number, we have to dispose of them?" So that's how that happened, and now, of course, the Toronto Humane Society does its welfare—and does it very well. I have nothing but praise for them. They do a wonderful job and are a wonderful facility, but they have had to resolve that particular conflict, and that is the result of what has happened.

0930

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member from Parkdale–

High Park on Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

First of all, I'll speak a bit about section 6, which seems to be bringing a lot of attention. I've certainly received some e-mails from people concerned with that section. It seems to be dealing with a bit of a turf war going on. What section 6 does is prevent anyone other than the OSPCA from using the name "humane society." Obviously, if you're the Toronto Humane Society, losing your name is something that is pretty important to you. So I certainly have some sympathy for that, and I don't support this section 6.

Speaking just a bit from the perspective of my own riding, I would like to see standards of care for zoos across the province. We have had a situation in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka where there have been roadside zoos, I guess is the terminology used, and there doesn't seem to be much in the way of rules to do with those roadside zoos. I would support province-wide rules that bring in standards of care for the animals so that you have proper-sized pens, for example, and their safety concerns are taken into effect.

We did have one case in the not-too-distant past in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka where a large exotic cat got out of its cage and killed a dog. Obviously that's not a good thing to be happening, and obviously that's a danger to the general public who might be visiting a facility like that, not to mention the situation for the animals that are being cared for there. I think we have a gap. We have some fairly tight rules for native animals in Ontario, but the exotic animals are missed. So there is a need for some rules.

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to give a two-minute comment on my colleague from Parkdale–High Park. I listened intently to what she had to say. I think there were three or four very important things, but time will limit me to only two comments.

The first was about the number of private members' bills that have been before this House that could have and should have been incorporated into this bill but were not. I remember the raw emotion of the day, going back a number of years, when the present member from Eglinton–Lawrence spoke about puppy mills. There were two competing bills at that time, one by the member from York–Simcoe and one by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. I remember thinking and listening to the bill and the sheer force of what was being said. I remember coming down on the side of the member from Eglinton–Lawrence because I felt that his bill was stronger and would have done a great deal more to ban puppy mills in the province. I looked forward to this bill, to see whether any of those very good ideas that he put before this Legislature all those years ago were contained, and sadly they were not.

I'm also reminded of the member from Willowdale and his groundbreaking work on roadside zoos. That too has not been contained within the body of the bill. The member from Parkdale–High Park was right to point out that this government all too often fails to utilize the private members' bills that are good.

On the subject of section 6, I can only concur. Having grown up in Toronto and having known about the Toronto Humane Society and its 121-year history, it seems an awful shame to me that we turn around at this point and simply change the name. They have done a wonderful job for the people of this city. I even got my own dog from there—more about that later.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to comment on the member from Beaches–East York and his comments here. I just want to point out to him section 11.4. I don't think the member from Parkdale–High Park read this section either. It's "Protection of Animals by Societies." It gives this bill the power to inspect wherever there are animals for exhibit, entertainment or boarding: "An inspector or an agent of the society may, without a warrant, enter and inspect any building or place used for animal exhibit, entertainment, boarding, hire or sale...." This is important in terms of roadside zoos and people who are in the business of displaying animals. That's in is this bill; it has never been in any bill before. It's very powerful legislation.

It also, for the first time, ensures that you are now not allowed to train animals to fight and kill each other in this province. That's allowed now in Ontario. All kinds of animals are being trained right now to kill each other—that's allowed. This bill, if passed, will make it not allowed. That's long overdue.

It also allows animal welfare inspectors to enter places of business to ensure that there is a standard of care. Right now there is zero standard of care. You can breed 10,000 puppies, kittens or whatever—no inspection allowed. Thousands of people, right now, are in the business of breeding animals for big profits with no inspections; you can't enter. These animals are in incredibly horrendous conditions. This bill would finally give animal welfare officers the power to inspect places of business to make sure there's a standard of care. Right now you can't do it.

Finally, veterinarians would have to report abuse. They don't do that right now because of the fact that they are not compelled to. Now they would be.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Parkdale–High Park, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks for all the comments.

First of all, to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence: It's native animals, not exotic animals, that are covered by this bill, whether they are penned, exhibited or whatever.

Absolutely, this bill is a step forward; it's a yard when we want a mile. "Why," one asks, and this is what our comments really circled around, "is section 6 there at all?" Why is this done at the expense of the Toronto Humane Society? This bill would take away "humane" from the Toronto Humane Society's name after 121 years. Why is that in the bill at all?

Also, my point still stands: It's one thing to have veterinarians report abuse; it's another to have the money to pay for the inspectors to go and find the abuse,

prosecute it and carry it to trial. That takes money. There's no money attached to this bill.

Absolutely, we in the New Democratic Party would like to see this bill go ahead to committee, would like to strengthen it, would like to plug the holes in it and would like to take section 6 out of it. We would like to make Bill 50, the animal welfare bill, an actual animal welfare bill for as many animals as could be included in it, and take out this turf warfare aspect, so aptly described by the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka. Take that piece out. It doesn't need to be there; it shouldn't be there.

I heard the comments of the member from York Centre. Notwithstanding the history he may have with the Toronto Humane Society, we had the president of the Toronto Humane Society, Tim Trow, here, as well as thousands of e-mails to show you that the Toronto Humane Society and all its supporters want section 6 out, and they should get it out.

This needs to go to committee. It needs to be supported, yes, but it also needs to be strengthened so that animal welfare in this province will be strengthened.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to speak to Bill 50 this morning. As the member from Parkdale–High Park has already highlighted, I do have some questions as to why we need to specifically remove or, let's say, micromanage the use of the name "humane society" when we talk about animal welfare agencies. I can't think of very many examples where we legislate what should or should not be in an organization's name when it's not offensive, and I don't think anyone would suggest that the words "humane society" are going to offend anyone. I would support the removal of section 6, where they must not use the words "humane society." Obviously that will assist the Toronto Humane Society, which I believe has been in existence longer than the bill we're modifying—120 years. This animal welfare legislation hasn't been reviewed in 90 years. I would support the removal of section 6 as well.

0940

There are a few things I would like to highlight, primarily because there have been a few opportunities for me to speak to people from my riding of Dufferin–Caledon who have had a chance to review Bill 50. I'll just start with Gord Grant, who happens to be the Ontario Federation of Agriculture representative for Waterloo, Wellington and Dufferin. He talks about Bill 50. I think what I'm reading about in his letter is the desire to have more information, more details. His first request is, "OFA requests that Bill 50 be sent to a legislative committee for public hearings following second reading."

I think I know where Gord is coming from, because when I start to read through the specific sections of the proposed legislation, there's some great stuff in it: "No person shall cause an animal to be in distress. No owner or custodian of an animal shall permit the animal to be in distress."

Nobody can train an animal to fight another animal or allow an animal owned or cared for to fight other animals; nobody can own equipment or structures used in animal fights or training animals to fight; nobody can harm a dog, a horse or any other animal that works with peace officers, whether or not the animal is performing those duties at the time of the harm.

There are some excellent things in Bill 50. What isn't in it is some of the detail. There is reference made to an obligation on behalf of veterinarians to report abuse. Again, a great idea, but if I was a veterinarian practising in Ontario today, I would want very specific feedback and details on what we're looking at. A benign example: There are those who will brush their cat's teeth. They say it keeps the cat healthier, it keeps it longer; there are many who would not brush their cat's teeth. If a vet is looking at an animal and seeing a buildup of plaque and a buildup of issues in their mouth, does that entail abuse? You can laugh, but in fact I have had vets in Dufferin–Caledon ask, "Where does it begin? Where does it end?" They would like to have clear limitations, clear expectations of what they are to look for and what they are to report. Those are the guidelines.

I guess that's where we come back to the regulations. The bill has some wonderful concepts in it, but I would like more of the regulations to be put in the actual legislation so that during committee, during debate, the people who are going to be affected by it—owners of animals, veterinarians, rural Ontario farmers—know specifically what their expectations are and, quite frankly, so that the people who have a very serious concern about animal welfare in Ontario know what to look for.

I grew up in rural Ontario, and I think of things that you do on the farm that are part of your standard operating procedure, for lack of a better word. When you tag cattle's ears it's kind of noisy. You get kind of busy. If someone was driving in rural Ontario, would they look at that operation from afar and say, "Hey, they're abusing animals in there. Those cows aren't enjoying themselves. I see people pushing the animals around"? Are they going to call the OSPCA on that? There's a huge education component that must occur whenever you empower people to call authority and initiate reviews without that third party review of either standing in front of a justice of the peace or getting the warrant.

Another example is when we wean cows from calves. It gets pretty noisy for a week or so. The calves get very agitated because they can't access their mother's milk whenever they want it anymore. If I was a new resident to rural Ontario living across the street from that farm operation, would I be concerned, call the OSPCA and say, "I don't know what's going on. Last week it was quiet and this week I'm hearing cows like crazy. What's going on? I think you should inspect. I think you should go in and pull the animals away"?

There was a very pointed letter from residents in my riding specifically related to the Ontario SPCA. Basically, the gist of their argument was that animals need to be protected in Ontario, without a doubt. But when you empower an organization with the kinds of powers that

we are giving to the OSPCA with Bill 50, there is an understanding that there should be a regulation, a review—an overseer, if I may.

They've actually gone to the point where they've put a petition together, and I'll just read the pertinent points:

"Whereas the Provincial Animal Welfare Act calls forth the Ontario SPCA, a private charity, whose 'object' is to facilitate and provide for the prevention of cruelty to animals and their protection and relief therefrom;

"Whereas every inspector and agent hired and trained by this private charity has and may exercise any of the powers of a police officer;

"Whereas this private charity does not answer to the Ombudsman or the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services; the Ontario SPCA is not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and no external mechanism of accountability exists;

"Whereas the McGuinty government refused to investigate the desperate plea of 29 resigned directors demanding that the Ontario SPCA be stripped of police powers (May 2006);

"Whereas the McGuinty government proposes sweeping reforms to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act granting further extraordinary powers to the Ontario SPCA, including the power of warrantless entry;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) ... direct the provincial government to investigate allegations of abuse of police powers and charter violations by the Ontario SPCA investigators;

"(2) ... explore the need for an external mechanism of accountability for the Ontario SPCA;

"(3) ... ensure that proposed changes to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act do not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

There are clearly individuals who have concerns that we are giving the power without giving the controls. I would hope that during committee and during the discussion that we would have at the committee level on Bill 50, some of those oversight agencies are considered as well.

I've already referenced section 6, and I think that has been covered very well by the member for Parkdale–High Park as well as our own critic from Simcoe–North, so I will just add my name supporting it.

The other thing—and again, this is from a farmer in my riding of Dufferin–Caledon. He talks about the fact that he firmly believes that no one should be cruel to animals and we need to have this legislation updated and brought forward. "From a farm perspective," he believes "it is unnecessary, unproductive, unethical and anti-social." He is concerned as a taxpayer that, because of the powers that we are giving, it's going to lead to a need for more inspections. I will add my comment there in terms of how I have no issue with the inspectors as long as the inspectors have that oversight and proper training they will need.

I think all of us understand the need to protect animals. I don't want someone who is overzealous and forgets that there are controls that go with power. You can't have absolute power and then not have anyone saying, "These are the things you look for. These are the things that you should be reviewing."

0950

He goes on to talk about the many pieces of legislation that have been enforced on the agricultural industry in Ontario. Most recently, he talks about the federal gun registry, but also nutrient management, the greenbelt legislation, source water protection, the Oak Ridges moraine, land rights. He makes an argument that every time you bring forward a new piece of legislation, a new regulation, there is implementation, or there are changes that have to occur on the ground level, so to speak. We have to decide as a society where our rights as landowners and our rights trying to earn a living balance against the rights of the animals in our care—and how much we can afford as a provincial government.

He talks about farmers. Farmers understand that their production levels go up when their animals are treated well. Their production and, therefore, the returns, increase when they are treating their animals—feeding, watering, bedding them—properly. He questions whether we have enough oversight from the agencies that are ultimately going to be enforcing Bill 50.

Bill 50 provides that animal abusers can be fined up to $60,000, end up in jail, or be banned from owning pets—perfect. These are all justifiable and necessary punishments for individuals responsible for animals under their care that are mistreated or abused. However, these punishments, particularly the jail time, cause concern, given the criteria under which alleged abusers can be investigated. If enacted, Bill 50 does not require animal protection officers to prove intent in case of cruelty, but only evidence of ownership and that the animal was mistreated. OSPCA agents have the right to inspect places other than a residence where animals can be kept for entertainment, exhibition, sale or hire, without a warrant.

I am concerned about the erosion of rights, that if passed these sections would be made law. If ever there was a slippery slope, entry into private premises without a warrant, possibly leading to jail time, would definitely be an example.

A warrant is issued by an independent third party after it has been demonstrated that there is a reason to believe that a crime has been committed. The purpose of the warrant is to safeguard individuals against arbitrary intrusion by law enforcers in the pursuit of a person suspected of committing actions worthy of crimes, or people committing them.

There are five scenarios in which the phrase "without a warrant" appears in Bill 50. One of these scenarios refers to the current act, while the remaining four are included in the proposed legislation. As legislators, we must always stop to ensure that our legislation complies with the guidelines laid out in the Constitution. These guidelines include a division of powers, but more importantly they include a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Free-

doms provides that, "Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure."

With respect to the five instances in which the phrase "without a warrant" appears, the word "reasonable" only appears twice: once in the current act and once in scenarios referring to the current act. This leaves a majority of times in which this legislation provides that no warrant is necessary, without any provisions that the search or seizure be reasonable. In light of the requirements of our constitution, this is troubling to me.

One need only look at decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada to see that legislation or policy that provides for warrantless search or seizures does not stand the test of the Constitution, not to mention warrantless seizures or searches that are intentionally not based on reasonable evidence. In Hunter v. Southam, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the search and seizure provisions in the Combines Investigation Act on the grounds that there was no provision for a prior independent review by a judicial officer of the appropriateness of the search. Writing for a unanimous court, Justice Brian Dickson provided the following comments with regard to section 8 of the charter: The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms "is to guarantee and to protect, within the limits of reason, the enjoyments of the rights and freedoms it enshrines. It is intended to constrain governmental action inconsistent with those rights and freedoms; it is not in itself an authorization for governmental action….

"The guarantee of security from unreasonable search and seizure only protects reasonable expectation. This limitation on the right guaranteed by s[ection] 8, whether it is expressed negatively as freedom from 'unreasonable' search and seizure, or positively as an entitlement to a 'reasonable' expectation of privacy, indicates that an assessment must be made as to whether in a particular situation the public's interest in being left alone by government must give way to the government's interest in intruding on the individual's privacy in order to advance its goals, notably those of law enforcement."

In striking down the legislation which allows the authorization to search, the court provided guidelines for search and seizure which have become an integral component of search law in Canada. Where it is feasible, a search must be approved by prior authorization. Although it may not always be reasonable to insist on prior authorization, there will be a presumption that a warrantless search is unreasonable. And I would hope that in Bill 50 that particular comment is very much part of the education and process as we train our officers.

The person authorizing the search must act in a judicial manner. Although the person need not be a judge, he or she must be in a position to assess in a neutral and impartial fashion whether a search is appropriate on the evidence available.

The standard for issuance of the warrant is similar to American probable cause. There must be reasonable and probable grounds, established upon oath, to believe that an offence has been committed and that evidence of that offence is to be found at the place to be searched. So it comes back to, if I'm a disgruntled neighbour and I've been listening to my neighbour's dog bark or whine for the last two weeks, I hope that is not sufficient for me to pick up the phone, call the OSPCA and initiate an investigation. I would hope that we give the OSPCA the ability to review those vexatious comments and sort them out, and that we give the inspectors the ability to make those calls—but we train them for it.

I will finish by saying that while I very much support the updating to the animal welfare act, I am disappointed that so much of the detail and the specifics are going to be left to regulation, where they will not be open to the public scrutiny and the public input that, quite frankly, I think we need when we are talking about rights of the property owner and rights of animal welfare in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened with interest to the member from Dufferin–Caledon. She gave a very extensive and well-researched discussion about Bill 50 and its problems. In my 20 minutes I tried to highlight some of those problems as well. I just want to comment on a couple of issues she raised that I thought were fascinating. One was the concern of veterinarians about the definition of abuse and the impact on veterinarians' practice. Again, one wouldn't be too worried for the veterinarians, I would think, but more worried for the animals perhaps, in that this bill doesn't have a lot of teeth—doesn't have any money behind it anyway. But certainly, it shows the lack of consultation that went into the drafting of this bill, that they didn't think to ask veterinarians, or certainly not enough veterinarians, what they thought to hear that obvious point of view.

The second aspect of this is about the warrantless search-and-seizure aspect of Bill 50. Again, I found that a fascinating discussion about rights. I'm a little concerned. Animals are somewhat different, and one can imagine an instance where an animal is left to suffocate in a car, where the right of the animal, one would hope, would overcome the necessity to serve somebody with a warrant before breaking the window and saving the dog or cat. I can see some problem areas here.

The member from Dufferin-Caledon highlighted the fact that these are areas that need to be looked at before the lawyers get at it and completely take away any possible impact for animals' welfare. The onus is on us, as legislators, to really make sure that this bill is tight, that the holes are plugged, that the ends are tied and that as this moves forward, it does what it's supposed to do; that is, look after animal welfare without being a detriment to humans.

1000

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to speak on the comments of the member from Dufferin–Caledon. I found it a bit farfetched that she would talk about whether or not the owner of an animal brushes its teeth might be subject to some kind of procedure under this act. I can imagine using some examples, but it's certainly too far-fetched to say that that might be a case of abuse. That is what

causes this sometimes irrational reaction to animal welfare protection.

I'd also like to mention that this bill is not about farm animals; it exempts agricultural communities under their regular practices. This is not about fish and wildlife and anglers and hunters, because they are not the problem. The problem is that right now, there are people making money breeding animals and you can't inspect their premises. Therefore, they breed animals in cramped conditions, they don't feed them, they keep them in the dark for weeks at a time and they can't be inspected. What this bill does is say that you can inspect.

We have the power to inspect restaurants to make sure the food is in hygienic conditions. Right now, you, as an individual, need a licence for dog ownership, yet you need no licence and you're not subject to inspection if you're in the business of breeding animals to kill each other.

There are two extremes: The NDP is saying, "Well, there are no teeth," yet the Tories are saying, "This is an unprecedented charter of rights violation." This is a reasonable attempt. People have been trying to do this for 90 years, and now you know why it has taken 90 years: When it comes down to it, there isn't the political will to stand up and say, "We've got to stop the abuse of animals in this province."

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the member from Eglinton–Lawrence's comments. I don't think anybody is opposed to shutting down puppy mills or inappropriate operations that cause a lot of distress in the quality of life for animals. That's not becoming to Canadians or to those of us in Ontario. I think the problem, when you cast that net, is what you take in. We hear a lot of things about roadside zoos. I'd like to know which roadside zoos they're referring to. Having had the privilege and honour in a previous government, I certainly gained the perspective that there was somewhat of a movement toward having two zoos, potentially, meet the standard they're looking at in these roadside zoos. Those would be the Toronto zoo and, with some adjustments, the African Lion Safari. Everything else would shut down, depending on who came forward and how the regulations came forward for the rest of the province. So there's a lot of concern out there, and there should be. Quite frankly, I have no problem shutting down some of these places. I can't walk into a place to see an animal, in some cases now, that a lot of people go to, but it gives some exposure to a lot of the public at large.

One of the other areas, when we cast this net, is the training apparatus. What happens with shock collars? Maybe you can tell us. For those who don't know, shock collars are used for invisible fencing, as a typical term. They put this wire around an area, and when the animal goes near it, the shock collar goes off and sends a signal: "You don't want to go there." It keeps dogs or animals protected in an area. It's the same thing with electric fences that are commonly used in rural Ontario to keep animals in. This is a way to train animals.

What would happen, specifically, with those sorts of apparatuses? Is it going to affect those? Is there going to be control? Quite frankly, I'd rather see a dog—to my knowledge, most of the time it's for dogs—contained in an area, rather than running free and a lot of times getting hit by vehicles or gone and in distress on its own from a different aspect in life.

Lastly, there's the enforcement aspect. Are conservation officers going to be given the opportunity to enforce this? If so, where is their direction going to come from?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to comment on the statements by the member from Dufferin-Caledon. I must admit, as a city boy who has spent all of one week of his life on a farm, and that only in the last couple of years, I listened intently to what she had to say. She gave me a perspective which, upon reading this bill, I had not had. She talked about the perspective from the agricultural community.

I listened to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence, who tried to dissuade me from thinking that they may or may not be involved, but I would be assured that if the act exists, people in all communities, not necessarily in urban ones, will be subject to the act.

I listened to what the member for Dufferin–Caledon had to say in terms of the reasonable search-and-seizure provisions of the act and the fact that "reasonable" had only been used on two occasions within the body of the act and how that may impact upon the Constitution.

Although I am generally in support of this bill, I do understand that it is going to have to be looked at very carefully by the Legislature. I would ask the government to be open to any amendments that may strengthen the bill or to make it perhaps lawyer-proof in terms of the actual provisions of the act so that when the bill becomes subject to third reading and is passed, we can assure ourselves and the people of Ontario that everything has been done properly in order to better protect animals and to safeguard the provisions that are there. The last thing we will need is to have some of these provisions challenged in court. I commend the member for Dufferin–Caledon for her statement here today and her contribution to the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Dufferin–Caledon, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like to finish by talking more specifically about Dufferin–Caledon. In our riding, we have the Orangeville branch of the OSPCA. They have done an incredible job, but I think even they would acknowledge that direction and specific outcomes are the key to having a successful piece of legislation and moving forward. I would hope that we stop this practice that seems to be occurring in government where more regulations are hidden from view and hidden from input, and in fact put it in the bill so that we can have that public debate and public input. It's critical that everyone in Ontario knows what the expectations are when we are talking about the protection of animals and the protection of society in general. I had some good comments from

the executive director. She talked about how people who abuse animals have a tendency to transfer or change that abuse into spousal and family abuse.

It would never be my intent to say that Bill 50 shouldn't go forward. I would just like more of Bill 50 to be in Bill 50 and less of it to be in the regulations, which can be changed without public input and public consultation. If I could leave with that comment, I would appreciate it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to speak on one very narrow part of the bill, and that is section 6. I have lived my whole life in the city, save and except for one year when I was a university student in Ottawa, so I think I know the city fairly well. One of the hallmarks of the city, one of the things that the people of Toronto hold very dear, is the Toronto Humane Society. As a mayor, as a councillor and as a person who was part of the whole municipal process for a great number of years, I can tell you that the most heated debates that we would have at East York council or the most heated debates that we would have at Toronto city council usually involved the subject of animals, usually involved the Toronto Humane Society and how the city or the staff was dealing with animals.

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In East York we had our own pound. We collected animals, as every municipality would do. We collected stray animals, animals in distress, animals that had attacked humans or other animals. We would have some dog enforcement people who would go out and bring the dogs—usually dogs, but sometimes cats—back to the little shelter that we had in East York. It was a fairly small shelter; we only had two employees. They would bring them back, and we would hold them for a number of days. Unfortunately, because it was not the Toronto Humane Society, if we could not locate the owners or if there were difficulties or if the animal was in distress, we would send them over to the city of York where they would be euthanized. We did not euthanize the animals in East York; we sent them to the city of York, because they had a facility and it was on a cost basis.

Whenever that happened and the animal's owner subsequently became aware that the animal was in East York, because the border would not be relatively well known to the dog or cat if they strayed from Toronto into East York—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Educate them.

Mr. Michael Prue: —Yes—we ended up with the animal. I remember on a couple of occasions where no one came forward to get a dog in these particular cases and the dog ended up being euthanized. You can imagine the sorrow and the anger of the family. Because the dog had been found in East York, we used our process. The family had gone down to the Toronto Humane Society and searched day after day, looking for their beloved dog, only to find out that our process allowed the animal to be euthanized. It was pretty sad.

I remember the debates around whether or not we should be doing that. The people who came to our council suggested we should adopt a policy similar to the city of Toronto to ensure that no dog, cat or household pet was euthanized, save and except in those circumstances where the animal was in distress.

I know there is huge support around for the Toronto Humane Society. I think that support exists not only because it is a venerable institution, having existed now for some 121 years, but also because they have made decisions in the past that the public tends to accept and to believe in. First of all is their decision not to euthanize pets when they come into their care. As has been stated, and I think correctly so, by former Minister Kwinter — I'm trying to remember his riding—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: York Centre.

Mr. Michael Prue: York Centre; thank you very much. As the member from York Centre stated, there is a difference between the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the humane society in terms of the numbers of animals that are euthanized. It is because the OSPCA is also an enforcement wing and not necessarily just an adoption agency, or in large part an adoption agency, that we see that dichotomy.

The people of Toronto believe in their humane society. They believe in the society's goal not to euthanize animals unless it's absolutely necessary. They also believe in the society's goal to educate. They go out, they have brochures, they have posters and they do whatever they can to educate people so that they will respect the pets they have, will understand how to properly care for them and will not leave them in distress, without either food or water. They do a tremendous job in terms of education.

They also do a tremendous job in terms of fundraising. Now, I know that the OSPCA does fundraising. They never seem to have enough money. Sitting as I do on the finance committee every year, as we travel the province, we have people from the OSPCA coming forward to talk not only about the bill that is before us today but also the fact that they do not have sufficient monies for inspectors, for training, for vehicles or for the care of animals. They make quite a compelling case each and every year to the finance committee, at least in the last six years that I have served on that committee, and they come, year in and year out, without fail, to talk about how they need more.

I don't remember the humane society asking for money all that much in the city of Toronto, although they would from time to time, because they have been extremely successful over their long period of time in collecting monies. They have been extremely successful in garnering public support, to donate when they need it, to build an institution of great care for animal welfare at River and Queen. And the public seems very content in terms of how they treat them, in terms of the donations and everything else. So it would be a shame for section 6 to take the authority of the Toronto Humane Society to call itself the name that has been identified with Toronto

for 121 years. I don't see the rationale behind this. If a government member can stand up and say why there is a rationale for this, it may make sense to me. I'm willing to listen. I'm willing to learn what the government rationale is. To date, I have not heard that. When this goes to committee, perhaps the parliamentary assistant or whoever else has carriage of the bill can explain why the government thinks section 6 is necessary. It seems to me that the bill will survive without section 6. It seems to me that the bill will do everything else it's supposed to do without section 6.

I would be remiss if I did not talk about my own personal experience with the Toronto Humane Society. I grew up, as I've said so many times in this House before, in Regent Park. People were not allowed in those days to have dogs, although the odd person would have a cat in some of the apartments there—cats that always seemed to escape and run around in the place. But dogs were a rarity. As a boy growing up, I did not have a dog. I got my first dog from the Toronto Humane Society after I had purchased a house. My wife, in her wisdom—and she is in most things very, very smart—said, "We need to have a dog." We went down to the Toronto Humane Society, looked around in the cages and came home with the dog whom I promptly named Artemis after the Greek goddess of the hunt. The reason I did that is because the dog was whining at the door. I didn't know much about dogs and I figured maybe the dog had to do its business. So I opened up the door and, to my shock and horror, I saw my dog, in four or five leaps and bounds, go to the end of the yard and chase a raccoon up the tree. Wow! At that point, I'd only had the dog a few hours, and I decided that her name should be Artemis because she really was a dog that loved to do that kind of stuff. I have to tell you that over the years my garden and my backyard were almost always raccoon-free. The raccoons learned that there was one place you didn't go if Artemis was out, or, if Artemis might be at the door or might get out in some way, you don't go in that backyard.

My experience with the Humane Society and the adoption of a dog was a profound one. When I went there, it was a whole adoption procedure. I had to sit down with an official and I had to talk to them about why I wanted the dog, what I intended to do with the dog. Was I going to use the dog for any purpose? They asked me all kinds of things. Was the dog going to be a working dog? Was I going to try to use it to assist the blind? There was all kinds of stuff. It seemed to me—I just wanted to take a dog home. At first, it was a little vexing, but I began to understand what they were doing: It was because they wanted to ensure the absolute welfare of that animal. They wanted to make sure that I wasn't some guy who was going to take it home and train it to fight. They wanted to make sure I wasn't going to cause it any abuse or harm, either from because I would be that way inclined or just from total neglect because I had no idea what to do. Of course, I had no idea what to do, but my wife had had a number of dogs in her life and she was able to show me in pretty short order all the things that needed to be done.

The Humane Society had my total support from that time on. Over the years, my wife and I would donate money to the Humane Society in appreciation for the wonderful dog that we had in our house. I will tell you that to this day, when people tell me they're thinking about getting a dog or getting a cat, I always tell them not to go out and buy one. I always tell them to go down to the Humane Society and to look in the cages of the animals that desperately need to be adopted and need to have a home. If they don't find what they want on one weekend, I'm sure they'll find it the next weekend or the weekend after that; to just be vigilant to find exactly the type of animal that they want, and to not go out and purchase animals that have been produced in puppy mills. I know that you can get purebreds and all those things, but if you just want a dog or cat to love, to bring home to your house, I can think of no finer place to get it.

So I'm asking the members opposite to think about this, to think about an institution that is 121 years old, to think about the thousands upon thousands—and probably hundreds of thousands—of animals that have been adopted into good homes in Toronto over all of those years, and to allow them to keep their name, to allow them to keep doing what they have done so successfully and to remain a part of the fabric of the city of Toronto. That is not too much to ask, and I think what they are asking is not too much to ask.

So, members opposite, if you're listening, when this goes to committee, find some way to remove section 6, to vote down section 6, to amend section 6. Do whatever is necessary in order that Toronto keeps an institution of which it is justifiably proud.

1020

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I just want to set the record straight on a couple of things. I do thank the member from Beaches–East York for his comments. I rise in support of Bill 50.

One of the things that I wanted to clarify was that the Ontario Veterinary Association, because I am a rural member, has lobbied me for four years to bring in specific language that this speaks to about mandatory reporting. This is something that they have wanted for many years, and quite frankly, they're very pleased that this is coming forward at this time.

The other thing that I wanted to clarify was that the removal of the word "Humane" will not be a result of this legislation.

Another thing that I wanted to clarify as well is that coming from a rural area, how we conduct ourselves with protecting the animals is much different than in an urban area. We rely solely on volunteers. The municipalities will get someone who will pick up the dogs, and there is licensing and that type of thing. But primarily, what we rely on in rural areas is volunteers.

The SPCA in one of my counties, Huron, holds a large event once a year, and it raises enough—about $45,000—that it's able to provide some types of services. So I can tell you, quite frankly, coming from a rural area, that we

need pieces of legislation that clearly lays things out. This, in fact, does. It starts to establish a procedure and a process which we all know going forward.

So for me to be able to stand and support Bill 50, which a number of my constituents are saying they want to see come forward, certainly is my pleasure and my privilege. I just want to share with the Speaker what we call society animals.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend the member from Beaches–East York for his presentation. One of the things that I found out as he was speaking about his first dog, and the fact that the dog was let out of the house very impatiently to chase a raccoon—

Mr. Michael Prue: She wasn't let out for that.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Well, that may be the case, but the reason I bring that up is that I did receive a concern expressed by some of the representatives from the farm community. They had concerns about the definition of the animals trained to fight. Obviously, this dog and a lot of farm dogs would be trained to protect livestock and to fight other predators. So does the bill exempt that, or would they then be called an animal that was trained for fighting purposes? I think that needs to be clarified.

The other thing I wanted to say was that there was a letter sent to the minister concerning this bill, and it was from the Ontario Farm Animal Council. That's an organization that represents some 45,000 farmers and farm-related agri-industries. There's some interesting parts in it. The letter states, first of all:

"Our concern is that Bill 50, which is now in second reading, is a set of very extensive and legally complex amendments that appear to be moving very quickly through the legislative process. These amendments would fundamentally change the powers and authority of the OSPCA as well as the legal obligations and requirements of all animal owners and handlers in Ontario."

It goes on to say:

"Due to the wide, sweeping changes proposed by the bill and the lack of consultation with the farming community"—and I think it's important, "lack of consultation"—"prior to its introduction, OFAC is strongly requesting the Ontario government take a more measured approach.

"We ask that Bill 50 be sent to a legislative committee for public hearings following second reading and that public hearings be held across Ontario, to allow farmers, anglers, hunters and other affected parties the opportunity to be heard and to ensure"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just in reaction to the member from Huron–Bruce, I want to read section 6. It says, "No corporation or other entity, other than the society or an affiliated society," meaning the OSPCA, "shall ... use the name 'humane society', 'society for the prevention of cruelty to animals'...." It's right in the act. This, in essence, is what the Toronto Humane Society is reacting to. It would take away their name, a name they've used for 121 years.

I second the member for Beaches–East York in asking the government side—and we haven't heard this from any of the speakers on the government side—to speak to section 6, to explain why section 6 is in an animal welfare bill and to explain the impact, of course, and why they feel that not only the Toronto Humane Society but another 234 societies that are concerned with the welfare of animals should be impacted by a so-called animal welfare bill, Bill 50. I've heard all sorts of things this morning from the government side and nothing about this, except for the comments from the member for Huron–Bruce, to whom I hold out the actual text of the bill. Sometimes we talk about bills and we don't actually read them. So, read it. It's right there in section 6. What we're asking for on this side with one unified voice is that section 6 be removed from Bill 50. It doesn't need to be there; it shouldn't be there; it needs to come out of there.

Just in the few remaining seconds, I want to say I was delighted to hear about the member for Beaches–East York's dog, Artemis. I think any of the amendments that come forward should have the names of animals attached to them, and Artemis is a very good one.

Let's hear from the government side some rationale for the existence of section 6, and with that I'll cease.

Mr. Mike Colle: I was just reflecting on a funny story that shows that animal protection crosses party lines. I remember that I was walking near Bathurst and St. Clair one day and there was this beautiful brown pointer that was running loose in traffic. I went over and I grabbed him and took him home. Then I phoned the Toronto Humane Society and said, "Listen, I've got this beautiful brown pointer at my house." You know what happened? A day later the humane society came to get him, and he was actually the dog of former Tory cabinet minister Dianne Cunningham's daughter; it ended up in my house. Anyway, a little anecdote. It was a beautiful dog, too; I hope it's doing well.

I think the member for Beaches–East York made a good point. When you're purchasing or trying to get a pet for your family, do not get one from the newspaper ads; they're probably from pet mills. Do not go to these flea markets. You saw what happened recently this year: There were dogs at the flea market that had rabies. Even many of the pet stores have dogs that come from pet mills too. The best place to get a pet for your family is to go to one of the rescue societies, and there are rescue societies for almost every breed of animal. These are rescued greyhounds or huskies—they're all over the province. These kind people have these dogs available for adoption. That's where to get them.

In rural Ontario, the big problem for many of the OSPCAs is that there are these humongous puppy mills, and all of a sudden, overnight, there will be100 animals that have to be taken care by the OSPCA. They have enormous pressures because the illicit breeding that this bill would hopefully put a stop to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Member for Beaches–East York, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to thank the members for Huron–Bruce, Oxford, Parkdale–High Park and Eglinton–Lawrence.

In the two minutes that I have, I first of all want to make sure the record is absolutely clear, to my colleague from Oxford. The dog was not let out to chase the raccoon; that was an unintended consequence. She was let out because I thought she needed to do her business, and her business was not what I thought. In any event, that is how she ended up getting her name. I just want the record to be clear: I wasn't trying to harm any raccoons in my backyard.

1030

The member for Parkdale–High Park spoke about section 6. Section 6 is very clear in its intent, and that's why I think it needs to be either taken out or amended in its entirety. There is no rational reason that I can think of that you would take away, by legislation, the name of a venerable institution like the Toronto Humane Society. It just is illogical to me that they would have to reinvent themselves with a new name after people of this city for generations have known them and known about them by that name.

The member for Eglinton–Lawrence makes a good point, and I thank him for his comments. Perhaps I should have said on my own that, when you get a dog or cat from the Toronto Humane Society and, I'm sure, all of the societies across Ontario, the animal is always spayed, so you don't have to worry about more animals being born. The animal always has all of its shots, is in remarkably good health and has been under veterinary care for at least a week or 10 days before the animal is put up for adoption. I think you're doing a whole lot for your family and for everyone else by adopting in a place like that rather than a flea market or a puppy mill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to join the debate this morning on Bill 50.

My friend from Beaches–East York talked about the release of the dog and the raccoon, and he mentioned the term "unintended consequences." That's exactly what we're dealing with here in this bill. There are a lot of possible unintended consequences that could happen as a result of this bill if it is not sent out to committee for hearings and input so that those people not only affected but those who have a broad knowledge of animals and animal rights issues in this province have a chance to have their input so that the legislation that we come up with at the end is, in fact, the best piece of legislation that we could have under the circumstances.

There are some real concerns about this bill, and they've been articulated by others, but I think it bears repeating by more members of this assembly. Hopefully it builds strength to the argument that the government has been perhaps nearsighted or short-sighted in introducing this legislation without dealing with some of these possible problems and unintended consequences so that we have the opportunity to let them know that this is what we are hearing out there, this is how we feel and this is how we believe the legislation could be improved.

There's no question that we have been without updated animal rights legislation in this province for far too long. We all agree. There is not a member of this assembly who would not state unequivocally that mistreatment of or cruelty to animals is not accepted anywhere in this province and should be not accepted anywhere in the world. We're all on the same page on that.

But we have some problems with some of the things that this bill speaks to, and everybody has spoken directly to section 6. I know that my colleague from Parkdale–High Park talked about the 121-year history of the Toronto Humane Society. For all intents and purposes, as we understand this bill, if it is enacted as it is written today, that society will cease to exist. It could not call itself the Toronto Humane Society under this legislation. What is the reasoning behind that? We need to know those kinds of things, we need to hear from the government, and we need to hear the counter-arguments. My colleague from Simcoe North said repeatedly in his leadoff speech that this bill very much requires that we take this to the people and get it out in a broad consultation throughout the province so that we can have input on those issues.

We talk about the concerns in agriculture and how this bill could impact agriculture and how people who don't understand agriculture might view the practices in agriculture as being unfair or inhumane or in fact being cruel to animals. One thing we do understand about agriculture is that even though these days it's pretty difficult, people are in agriculture for the purpose of running a profitable business. It would do them no good whatsoever not to treat their animals in the best possible way. Those animals, if they're mistreated, are going to expire before the farmer has the opportunity to harvest them for gain, in which case that's a huge expense to the farmer, because they would have purchased and or raised this livestock for the purpose of eventually slaughtering it. That's what we do in agriculture; it's for food. If they mistreat them, the mortality rate is certainly going to go up. In fact, if they not only don't mistreat them but treat them very well with regard to inoculations and all of those kinds of things, the mortality rate goes down. That's all been proven.

The onus on the farmer to be very careful and very circumspect with regard to the treatment of his or her animals is well documented, common sense and good business practice. If you're going to be a successful business person, you're going to try to run that business under good business practices. There's no incentive for farmers to mistreat their animals, because it's going to hurt them—very much so. It's certainly going to hurt the animals, but it's going to hurt the farmer in the pocketbook, on the bottom line, and no farmer is going to be intentionally doing that.

I think we have to be wary of people who do not understand agriculture, who might see a practice on a farm and say, "Hey, that's cruelty. We need inspectors. We need the animal police, the OSPCA, to get in here and get in here quick and raid this farm," because there's a lack of information and a lack of understanding as to what actually happens in the agriculture business.

My colleague from Dufferin–Caledon raised an interesting issue under the standards of care. We need to be very defined about those standards of care, because for some people, they're different. I see some people here in Toronto walking their dogs in the wintertime and they have a coat on the dog, little booties and a toque. I don't even wear one myself, although I probably should; some people say there's been some severe freezing going on up there. But if I'm walking my dog—I don't have a dog here in Toronto; I wouldn't have a dog here in Toronto—and I don't have booties, a coat and a toque on the dog, am I mistreating that dog? In the view of some people, maybe I will be.

The member from Dufferin-Caledon talked about how some veterinarians actually believe that if you're not brushing your pet's teeth, whether it's a cat or a dog, you're not giving them the standards of care they should be entitled to.

Mr. Peter Kormos: For Pete's sake.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Mr. Kormos invokes his own name by saying "For Pete's sake." He's questioning the logic of that kind of thing, but that's actually how some people see these issues. So we need some real clarification on standards of care.

One of the problems we have here is with regard to warrantless entry. My friend from Dufferin-Caledon also cited the charter argument, in section 8 of the charter, with regard to warrantless entry. We have the situation here where the advocate is also the police. That's something we should always be concerned about: when the advocate is also the one responsible for enforcement. With all due respect—and I am very proud of the work that the OSPCA does here in Ontario—is it acceptable that those who are the advocates are also the ones who decide when someone is in breach? Are they truly the most objective party to be making those kinds of assessments? That's why we have various arms of the justice system, where those who enforce the law are not those who decide whether the person who was, in their opinion, guilty of an infraction is in fact guilty. We have to pass that on to another branch.

There's where I think there could be some separation that would give some people at least reason to believe that the advocates are not the ones who are also out there laying the charges or being the ones who say, "You are in breach of the act." Those are always things that I think people in a society such as ours have concerns about, if we give too much power to one group, because with that power comes great responsibility. Actually, it's a responsibility that most people don't want to have. They want to ensure that some who are less partial or less subjective are actually the group that enforces the law.

1040

It was interesting, what my colleague from Oshawa mentioned about these dog-shock collars or this invisible fencing stuff, where people have a fence around the perimeter of their property because they don't want that pet to get into a dangerous situation. I live right on the highway, for example, so if I had a dog—and we don't have a dog; we had one for 17 years, but we don't have one now—if that dog didn't understand the parameters and the boundaries of the property, it would be very susceptible to getting run over by a car because we live right on Highway 60, where the traffic is going by. So will some people view the fact that a dog has a collar around it so that when it gets close to that perimeter of the property, where they've got the invisible fencing installed, it receives a shock—will some people say that that's inhumane treatment of the animal? That's a fair question. We don't know what's going to happen with these regulations, and that's why we do need this bill to get out there to the people in the province, so that they can have their input on this very, very important issue.

My colleague from Oxford raised a very interesting scenario, where the dog may encounter another animal. Part of a farm dog's job is to protect the livestock; it's a working dog. Can the farmer or the operator of the farm be held responsible if that dog in fact does go out to challenge an intruder, another animal that's intruding onto the farm that may be a threat to some of the livestock that cannot defend themselves? It's a very interesting point.

I don't have the answers to those things. They're questions, they're not answers, and that's why it's extremely important that we get this bill out to hearings, not just here in Toronto. I think you're going to need some hearings in Toronto, because there are going to be some people who are understandably upset that what you're doing in this bill is saying that the Toronto Humane Society, which has been in business for 121 years, is now out of business. You're saying, "You're going to have to come up with a new name. You're not going to be able to call yourselves the Toronto Humane Society."

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Wrong, wrong, wrong. That's wrong.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is in his seat saying, "Wrong, wrong." Well, tell us what the facts are; we'd love to hear them. But this is what the humane society is saying; this is what advocates of the humane society are saying. It's easy for the minister to sit in his seat and say, "That's wrong," but we're asking for those answers. If you can give comfort to those humane societies that this is in fact not the case—

Mr. Dave Levac: Just read Hansard.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Just his words in Hansard—I'm sorry, I say to the member from Brant. The minister's words in Hansard are no more comforting than his interjection saying, "Wrong." We need to back that with some legal opinions. Let's get some people who are actually willing to say from a legal perspective that this

does not threaten the existence of the Toronto Humane Society in its present form, using the name that it goes by today. That's the kind of clarification we're looking for, I say to the member for Brant and to the minister, not an interjection from your seat saying, "Wrong, wrong." I've got interjections from my seat saying, "Right, right."

Mr. Robert Bailey: Right, right.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes. The member from Sarnia–Lambton says, "Right."

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Wrong.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And the minister again says, "Wrong." Obviously, we have a debate. That's a very, very good justification for getting this bill—as the member from Simcoe North, our critic, says, "Let's get this out to the province. Let's get this out to the people as soon as possible." As soon as we can finish with the second reading debate, have the people who are entrusted with writing the regulations get out to the various stakeholders, including the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and all these groups, to get a proper reading on how other people in the province of Ontario see this piece of legislation. We have concerns, they have concerns, and I think it's in everybody's best interests to allay those concerns as much as possible by taking this bill to the people.

I want to touch lastly, if I have any time—Speaker, I know you're going to interrupt me at some point, I know I'm not going to get my full five minutes and 55 seconds left. I don't believe that. Am I? The Speaker is changing; he may not see the clock.

I do want to touch on the comments of the member from Dufferin–Caledon, who's very concerned about the section 8 issue in the charter with regard to warrantless entry. In a society such as ours, when you grant any party, regardless of your motives—and as I say, I know that when the government brought in this bill, it was fully with good intentions because the legislation did in fact need to be updated after 90 years—as the member from Beaches–East York said, "What about the unintended consequences?" He was talking about something else, but the phrase applies. What about the unintended consequences?

When you attach and grant any party the rights to warrantless entry, boy, that crosses some pretty strong lines here with respect to people's rights and the right not to be unnecessarily detained—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. The time being 10:45, I'm going to have to adjourn this debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce some guests visiting Queen's Park today:

In the west gallery, on behalf of the member from Timmins–James Bay: Wayne Campbell, vice president of Truck Training Schools Association of Ontario;

On behalf of the leader of the third party: representatives from Campaign 2000, Toronto and York Region Labour Council and Canadian Labour Congress in the west public gallery and in the members' gallery as well;

On behalf of the member from York South–Weston: students from St. John the Evangelist Catholic School and Peter Scully from St. John the Evangelist school in both the east and the west galleries;

On behalf of page Emily Philp-Tsujiuchi: her mother, Ellen Philp, and her father, Wayne Tsujiuchi, in the east members' gallery; and

On behalf of page Bilaal Rajan: his father, Aman Rajan, his mother, Shamin Rajan, a friend, Justin Ford and his mother, Sharon Ford, in the west members' gallery.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. On Friday we learned that Ontario lost 15,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in April. That brings the total from 204,000 to a little over 207,000 jobs lost. Our unemployment rate in this province remains above the national average.

I think that this can fairly be described as a crisis that demands the government's immediate attention—not a pesticide ban, if the Premier isn't familiar with the details, and not a fishing expedition to Italy.

When is the Premier going to buckle down and focus on this crisis? Some 207,000 Ontario families need his government's attention now.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's always a concern when any family is affected by job loss. We are working hard, and the member opposite knows that we're working hard, whether it's in our recent budget, whether we reduced and effectively eliminated capital taxes for our manufacturers and resource-based sectors, or the $1.5 billion in our recent budget, again, that was devoted to skills and post-secondary education opportunities for Ontarians.

But I would ask my colleague to keep some perspective on this. According to Stats Canada, there are 69,500 more jobs today in Ontario than there were in December 2007. In April, we created 60% of all new Canadian jobs right here in the province of Ontario. Of those new jobs, 91% are in the private sector. Yes, we are losing jobs, but the good news is that we keep creating more than we're losing.

1050

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I will get to those Stats Canada numbers later. But last month, a TD report was released that indicated that, in terms of displaced manufacturing workers who were lucky enough to find a job,

they earned 25% less than they had received in the manufacturing sector. That represents about $10,000 a year.

We've heard this rhetoric from the Premier. There are many measures the Premier could take to address unemployment in this province, and I'm just going to give you one example: Lower the apprenticeship ratio. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce is calling for it. It's simple. There's no cost involved and no new program to eat up and be administered. It can be done immediately and, more importantly, it gets unemployed people working now. I ask the Premier: Why aren't you doing it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to say directly to my colleague that we are taking a very close look at that recommendation on his part. It's not the kind of thing that the government can do on its own. There's an independent body that makes these decisions. But I think he's raising—and I give him credit on this score—a legitimate issue.

Let me just say this. It's interesting: The leader of the official opposition says that he's concerned about wages, but for eight years on their watch they froze the minimum wage in Ontario. You would think that if they had a concern for the plight of working people, they would have done something to lift that freeze and increase the minimum wage on a regular basis. We're proud of the fact that we've increased the minimum wage four times, and we're also proud of the fact that we continue to invest in educational and skills upgrading opportunities for all Ontario workers.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Under the Progressive Conservative watch, there were over a million new private sector jobs created in the province.

The Stats Canada figures the Premier referenced earlier indicate that the bulk of new jobs created in this province are in the public sector. Since taking office, you've added 102,000 more people to the provincial payroll. These are paid for by tax revenues from private sector jobs, of which there are fewer and fewer.

The Premier could choose to lead on this crisis. He could choose to cut business taxes now, he could choose to reduce red tape now, and he could choose to lower the apprenticeship ratio now, all of which the Canadian Federation of Independent Business is calling for.

Premier, why are you sticking to protecting unions, in that one example for sure? Why have you abandoned small business and unemployed workers and made them orphans of this government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I want to remind the leader of the official opposition that of the 69,500 more jobs found in Ontario today in comparison to December 2007, 91% of those are in the private sector.

It is true that we have, during the course of the past four and a half years, increased the number of people working in our public services. But I'll ask the member opposite who he feels we should not have hired. Does he feel that we should not have hired nurses; MRI technologists; long-term-care workers; home care workers; public health unit inspectors; water inspectors; meat inspectors; labour inspectors; teachers; vice-principals; librarians; guidance counsellors; autism therapists; children's aid society social workers; child care staff; teaching assistants; crown attorneys; police officers—I could go on and on. Which ones should we not have hired?

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Last Monday, the chair of one of your provincial government agencies hosted a high-end soiree aimed at federal members of Parliament at one of Ontario's swankiest bars and most expensive steakhouses. Premier, as a rule, do you think it is appropriate for a provincial crown agency to spend public funds to wine and dine lobbyists and federal MPs with whom they have no direct dealings?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I look forward to receiving a little bit more information in the supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Apparently the Premier has no rule whatsoever.

Last Monday, Steve Mahoney, the head of WSIB, threw a swanky soirée at the Martini Ranch at Hy's Steakhouse in Ottawa for federal members of Parliament and other Ottawa insiders and lobbyists. The Yellow Pages, www.ottawaplus.ca, describes Hy's as "A place to be: Hy's is where Ottawa's movers and shakers come to dine. Lunch is wall-to-wall power lunches with the power suits of Parliament Hill, and night time brings an atmosphere of luxury and celebration." Escargots begin at $11.95; cocktails can hit $20 plus.

Premier, what does sipping single-malt scotches with Chrétien-era cabinet minister Wayne Easter from Prince Edward Island have to do with helping injured workers in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm not aware of the issue that the member's discussing, but I would say this: When we came into office four and a half years ago, one of the first things we did was conduct an audit of the WSIB. We did that because, frankly, it was in a mess because of the management of that particular government. We have been able to bring sense back to the WSIB when it comes to fiscal management. The result has been better services for workers, and at a rate that businesses have found acceptable.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The minister says he doesn't know this occurred. Well, he'd better darn well get to the bottom of it and report back to the House right away. Mr. Mahoney, I remind him—a good friend of the minister's—is a former Liberal member of provincial Parliament—until 1995. He served as a Liberal member of Parliament from 1997 to 2004. He was a cabinet minister under the Chrétien government.

Those enjoying expensive drinks and high-end finger foods at the Martini Ranch with Mr. Mahoney included a former Liberal colleague, Speaker Milliken; a former Liberal cabinet minister, MP Judy Sgro; and of course, from Prince Edward Island, MP Wayne Easter.

The need to have a high-end reception with federal members is dubious at best; to have it at the famous and

swanky Martini Ranch is just plain wrong. Clearly, Mr. Mahoney is trying to show off what a big man on campus he has become. Minister, will you report back to the House on the expenses and tell me what the repercussions for your friend Mr. Mahoney are going to be?

Hon. Brad Duguid: As I'm sure the member is aware, the WSIB is an arm's-length agency of this government. I know the member's aware of that. But I can tell you that all expenditures of the WSIB are reported back. Unlike in the days when his government was in office, the WSIB has to be accountable for everything they're doing. They'll be held accountable for everything they're doing, by us and by the public. It's something that we make sure is a priority, not only in the WSIB but all of our crown corporations. Frankly, the work that we're doing in working with our crown corporations and fixing up the mess that we inherited from those guys has been a lot of work, but we're getting the job done. We're getting much better value for taxpayers' money than ever was done under the previous government.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Statistics Canada's most recent jobs report shows that Ontario lost another 15,000 good manufacturing jobs in April. This brings the total number of manufacturing jobs lost to well over 200,000—one fifth of all the manufacturing jobs in the province. As the job losses mount, can the Premier tell us why the McGuinty government has failed to sustain good manufacturing jobs in Ontario, and failed those workers and their communities too?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As I said earlier in response to a question from the leader of the official opposition, every time an Ontario family is affected by job loss, that is something we all feel and we wish we could do more to prevent. I know that the leader of the NDP understands that manufacturing job losses are something that is affecting North America as a whole.

But there are other sides to this economic picture as well. He made reference to the number of manufacturing job losses. I'd ask him to keep in mind that since 2003, we are now ahead by 467,200 net new jobs, and 80% of those are full-time positions. As he mentioned a moment ago as well, in terms of job growth in January, February, March and April of this year, we're ahead by 167,500 more jobs in comparison to December 2007.

1100

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier says that manufacturing jobs are being lost everywhere. This is a headline from the Winnipeg Free Press this Saturday: "Manitoba an Oasis of Job Creation." More than half of the new jobs in Canada are being created in that province, many of them in manufacturing. It would seem that there's quite a difference between Ontario and our neighbour to the west.

Here's the reality for Ontario: In Windsor, good jobs are being replaced by low-paid jobs, which is why average family income in Windsor has dropped 10% under the McGuinty government. In Hamilton, good jobs are being replaced by low-paying jobs, which is why the average family income in Hamilton has dropped 4% under the McGuinty government. How many more good jobs have to be lost in Ontario before the McGuinty government takes this issue seriously and responds with something other than photo ops?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I note that last month both Alberta and BC lost manufacturing jobs. I also note that last month 60% of all new Canadian jobs were created right here in Ontario.

The leader of the NDP just refuses to recognize some of the efforts that we make, some of the investments that we continue to make when it comes to dealing with job losses in Ontario. He doesn't agree with our plan to put $190 million directly into the hands of our manufacturing sector so that it can begin to grow stronger. We did that by making our elimination of capital taxes retroactive to January of last year. He doesn't recognize the $1.5 billion we're putting into training for our workers. We think that one of the most important things we can do in a global economy is to enhance the employability of our workers. While we can't guarantee them a job, we can guarantee enhanced employability, which is why we continue to create all kinds of new long-term training opportunities for Ontario workers.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier can talk about job training. The reality is that only 10% of the workers who've lost their jobs are going to get job training under the McGuinty government, the reality is that Ontario's unemployment rate is now above the national average, and the reality is that a province like Manitoba now has an unemployment rate of 3.8%, the lowest in the country. Manitoba's doing some things right; Ontario's doing some things wrong.

What has Manitoba done? They have had a sustained policy of maintaining reasonable industrial hydro rates so manufacturers can operate there. They've brought in a manufacturing investment tax credit which is refundable, so even companies that aren't making a profit can continue to operate. When is the McGuinty government going to adopt some of these policies to sustain good manufacturing jobs, since they obviously work in Manitoba?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it is important to look at what's happening in other provinces, other states and other parts of the world to see how they're grappling with a US-induced global economic slowdown, but there are some limits to the comparisons. My friend talks about how it's important for us to have the same kinds of electricity policies as Manitoba. They're running on hydroelectric capacity. We have an entirely different foundation here when it comes to our generation in the province of Ontario.

But I can tell you, when I talk to my colleagues around the province, nobody else can say this: In the last four years we've put $4 billion more into our public schools. We have a learning-to-18 program now in Ontario, the first of its kind. We've put $6.2 billion into our post-secondary education system and skills training. In our

recent budget we put $1.5 billion into skills training opportunities for our workers. We've also increased the minimum wage four times. Many of my colleagues look to these kinds of policies with a certain amount of admiration and perhaps even a little bit of envy.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Today, Campaign 2000 and the Toronto District Labour Council released their report, which shows the harm done when good manufacturing jobs are destroyed. According to this report, the average manufacturing worker in Ontario who loses his or her job experiences a 25% decline in their income. For too many of these workers, that 25% decline means they end up below the poverty line.

Will the Premier admit that the McGuinty government's real economic story is to allow good manufacturing jobs to be lost and that, in fact, they're being replaced with low-paying jobs that don't provide adequate income or adequate job security for working families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're all very concerned about what's happened to the economy and, in particular, the kinds of high-paying jobs that we're losing, but I don't think it's helpful to hearken back to some nostalgic view of the past and say that we can somehow recreate that. I think our responsibility is to make people hopeful so that they can embrace the future.

I think one of the most important things that we can do, and this informs our policy, is to enhance the employability of our workers. We continue to invest in our human resources, to develop our human capital. That's why we've established such a high priority on the investments that we make in education. That's why we've made learning-to-18 the law in Ontario. That's why we've got 100,000 more young people in our colleges and universities. We've got 50,000 more people in apprenticeships. We're graduating 10,000 more young people from our high schools every year—people who used to drop out. That's why our recent budget speaks, through $1.5 billion, to the need to continue to invest in our people. If our people have the skills they need, I'm confident that they will do well in this new competitive economy.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, you talk as if government doesn't have any tools to influence good jobs. This is the title of the Campaign 2000 and labour council report: The Role of Good Jobs in Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. And they make some recommendations to ensure that we have better jobs and better-paying jobs: the reinstatement of card certification so that lower-paid workers, especially women and new Canadians, can form a union to fight for better-paying jobs, and the implementation of a Buy Ontario transit program of at least 50% Canadian content with final manufacture in Ontario.

These are two initiatives that the McGuinty government has already turned down. I've already suggested two initiatives that Manitoba has implemented which have resulted in more manufacturing jobs. Why won't the McGuinty government use these tools when good organizations are offering them as ideas to maintain good jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, just to put this into some perspective, the Ontario average hourly wage rate is up 12.7% from 2003. Contrast that with the consumer price index, which has gone up 7.9% since 2003, which means there is some good news to be found here. I want to take the opportunity to commend Campaign 2000 for the work that they continue to do to put the poverty issue on the public agenda.

I want to thank them for their support as well for our Next Generation of Jobs Fund. It is really a remarkable investment on the part of government on behalf of the public. It is not something that is seen anywhere else in North America. It is designed specifically to promote the kinds of jobs and the green economy that Campaign 2000 and the labour community are now supporting.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I can't believe that the Premier would boast about the growing income gap as well, because what Campaign 2000 and other income studies show is that, yes, there are some people who are doing incredibly well in this economy. The banks and insurance companies love your reduction of the capital tax. That means they can take home hundreds, millions more in profits. But that doesn't help low-paid workers. That doesn't help manufacturing workers who have lost their jobs.

One of the other suggestions from Campaign 2000 and the labour council is to move towards green jobs. One of the other solutions New Democrats offered you was a refundable manufacturing tax credit that would reward green manufacturing jobs, but the McGuinty government has turned that down as well.

My question again: Why has the McGuinty government turned away from almost every positive, progressive solution to maintain good manufacturing jobs in Ontario?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's not that we've turned away from every positive, progressive solution; it's just that the positive, progressive solutions that we continue to put forward are not supported by the NDP, including eliminating capital taxes. I think that's really important for our manufacturing sector. We did that retroactively to January 2007. Effective immediately, that puts $190 million into the hands of our manufacturers, who need the help right now. That's what we're doing. We continue to invest in our people. Our strength fundamentally lies not in the stuff that we can pump out of the ground here in Ontario; it lies in those who walk on the ground—that's our people. So we continue to invest in their skills, in their education.

As I said a moment ago, we have 100,000 more young people in our colleges and universities; we have 50,000 more people in apprenticeships; 10,000 more young people graduating from high school instead of dropping out. We now have the highest rate of post-secondary education in the western world. I think that's worthy of celebration, but we're not going to stop there. We con-

tinue to make investments, and we look forward to counting on the support of my colleague opposite.

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, we on this side of the House were shocked—shocked—to learn that the WSIB, an agency designed to protect injured workers, would hire expensive lobbyists to send out invitations and host a party on behalf of the WSIB. Will the minister at this time tell us how much the WSIB paid these lobbyists to send out these invitations. How much does the WSIB spend on lobbying annually?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This is exactly the same as the first question. I guess the opposition is running out of material here today. I'm happy to respond. The WSIB is an arm's-length agency of this Legislature and of this government. The members know that full well. They report their expenses every year and they have to be accountable for what they do, unlike under the previous government. When we inherited the WSIB, it was in very difficult financial shape. We've done an audit on that. The WSIB has fixed its operations up, and the bottom line is, the service level is better. In point of fact, we're accomplishing what we're trying to accomplish, and that's to reduce workplace injuries. That's what they should be talking about in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker—the progress we're making in reducing workplace injuries.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Obviously we didn't get the answer the first time, so that's why I had to come back and ask a second time.

Interjection: They haven't answered you yet.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, they haven't answered me yet.

Hy's Steakhouse is one of the premier restaurants in Ottawa, so I'm told, and I can see why the WSIB would want to have a nice reception there. I'm just not sure that it is an appropriate use of funds that are provided by employers to take care of injured workers. Would the minister commit to report back by the end of the day on the cost of this rendezvous, and while he is at it, would the minister tell us if he agrees with the chair that this soiree was an appropriate use of injured workers' money?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Again, I'd say that the WSIB is an arm's-length agency of this government, and its expenses are published. They do have to be accountable for the money they spend—to us, to this Legislature and to the people of Ontario. This is the second-largest insurance company on the entire continent. I'm not aware of the issue that the member is talking about in terms of what was being done or the purposes behind it, but I thank the member for bringing it to my attention.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Premier. The new Campaign 2000 report found that median wages in the food and accommodation sectors were only about $9.50 an hour and that the average salary is only $15,000, well below the Statistics Canada low-income cut-off for a single person living in a large city. Why won't your government acknowledge that the current minimum wage of $8.75 an hour is below the poverty line and that it needs to be raised to $10.25 an hour now?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government has moved to raise the minimum wage four times and is moving in what I would call a prudent and balanced way to continue to raise the minimum wage between now and 2010. This, added to a number of investments we have made in infrastructure, innovation and skills training, is designed to help those people who are affected by the challenging times in our economy today.

We welcome advice from Campaign 2000 and others. This government and this Premier have appointed a cabinet committee to look at ways to reduce poverty here in Ontario. The minimum wage increases we've made to date are part of that strategy, and there's more to do. This government remains committed to bringing about greater fairness in Ontario's economy to help all the people share in the great bounty that is Ontario.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Consulting about poverty won't change poverty, but raising the minimum wage will change poverty lines.

It's not just Campaign 2000 and the NDP that recognizes that the minimum wage is too low—

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The United Nations has stated that current minimum wage and social assistance rates in Ontario contravene people's "right to an adequate standard of living." When will your government implement a minimum wage that doesn't violate the basic rights of Ontarians?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I do need to correct the record. In fact, we have already raised the minimum wage five times, not four times as I said. And we have done it in what I would call a prudent and responsible fashion, because we are working diligently to address the issues of poverty in our midst.

But let me tell you what that member has done recently. She voted against paying for 15,000 child care spaces. She voted against insulin pumps for children in Ontario. She voted against 120,000 grants for university and college students—120,000 she voted against. She voted against doubling support for children with autism, and she voted against the Ontario child benefit.

This government is answering the challenges in Ontario's economy. It's answering the challenges confronting people of more modest means. We invite the member opposite to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: My question today is also for the Minister of Labour. Various media reports in and around Ontario have outlined concerns with the operation

and outcomes related to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and specifically its experience rating programs.

My community of Oakville and all of Ontario has a very strong and a very diverse economy, but I think we'd all agree that nothing is more important than all the working mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, returning home safely to their families each and every day.

Minister, I understand the WSIB is conducting a review of its experience rating program. Would the minister please update the House on the review?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to begin by thanking the member from Oakville for his work on this file and others with regard to helping and advocating for injured workers in Oakville and across this province.

The member is correct. The WSIB announced on March 10 that it would begin conducting a review of the experience rating program. The review will take place over the next little while. We expect them to report back by, at the latest, March 2009. The chair has indicated that if they could report back sooner than that, that would be even better, but at the outset, the worst-case scenario will be a report back in March 2009.

We acknowledge that the experience rating program can be improved. That's why we encouraged the WSIB to continue this review. We think it's very important that we use every tool at our disposal to get workplace injuries down across this province. We've made very significant progress so far, with a 20% reduction in workplace injuries.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I know that our government has made the health and safety of Ontario workers a major priority. As I said earlier, every day, hundreds of thousands of workers head off to work in a number of hazardous sectors. We want to see them return home safely every day, and I know that nothing is more important to all members here than workers' safety.

What my constituents want to see is the progress that is being made, not only to prevent workplace accidents, but also ensure that those who are injured receive the proper care. I would ask the minister to tell this House what this government and what the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board are doing currently for injured workers.

1120

Hon. Brad Duguid: As I said before, our top priority when it comes to the WSIB is reducing workplace injuries across this province. Four years ago, this government set a goal of a 20% reduction in workplace injuries. Over the last four years, we've been able to achieve that. That's 50,000 workers who did not go home from work injured. That saves this economy about $5 billion in all. That's a pretty significant savings to the economy. We've done that through a combination of approaches. We've done that through the "road to zero" initiative taken by the WSIB, which is working very hard, through promotion and awareness, to bring down workplace injuries. We've done that by hiring 200 additional occupational health and safety inspectors. These inspectors are going out to workplaces right across this province, working with employers, working on worksites to try to make them safer and healthier for our workers.

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Labour and it relates to a disturbing practice by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. It seems that businesses in this province are now being asked to hand over their customer lists in order for them to become registered with the agency. The minister must know that a customer list is one of the most valuable assets of any business in this province and has always been held in the strictest of confidence. Is the minister aware that this practice is taking place? Second, when was the practice initiated and how can it possibly be justified?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. In answer to your question, no, I'm not aware that this is a practice of the WSIB, so I can't answer the question of when it was initially brought into place. But I'd be more than happy to contact the chair, Mr. Steve Mahoney, to find out what this particular program is about and whether in fact there's a need to ask for this information. I'd be more than happy to check with the WSIB further to determine if indeed this is a practice, and if it is a practice, why they would ask for that kind of information.

Mr. Frank Klees: I appreciate that the minister will follow up. I can tell the minister now that when my constituent asked the WSIB why they would possibly want that information, the response was because it helps them in auditing other businesses. I trust that the minister will agree that that's unconscionable.

I have a memo here from my client and it says this: "Will you please help to defend the right of an employer like myself to protect the right to keep my customer list confidential?" I think that we all want to ensure that the WSIB can do its work appropriately and that they can do their audits, but surely they won't blackmail businesses in this province into disclosing their customer lists in order to give them information that they should be able to find some other way. Will the minister undertake to protect the confidentiality of customer lists of businesses in this province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: As I said, this matter has just been brought to my attention today, and I'd be more than happy to check with the chair of the WSIB to determine what this practice is about and if indeed there is a reason for making this request, what it is for. That's certainly an undertaking that I'd be more than pleased to embark upon.

Another thing that I have talked to the chair about—I think this entire government is very, very committed to doing all that we can to reducing the regulatory burden for businesses across our economy. The WSIB, of course, has a lot of dealings with businesses here, and I have spoken to the chair about ways the WSIB can work as effectively as possible with our business partners to reduce that regulatory burden as much as possible. I'm

more than happy to talk to the chair about that particular matter, and I thank the member for raising it today.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Premier. General Motors has just announced that they are closing the last General Motors plant in Windsor, the Windsor transmission plant, putting over 1,200 workers out of work. My question again: How many more manufacturing workers in Ontario have to lose their jobs before the McGuinty government starts to take the loss of manufacturing jobs seriously and puts forward some thoughtful, practical strategies to sustain good manufacturing jobs in Windsor and in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I spent some of my weekend devoted to this bad news for Windsor and for the families affected by this. I know that our heart goes out to them.

GM has made a decision, at their headquarters in the US, that they're no longer going to produce the inefficient four-speed transmissions. They're going to move to a new product, a six-speed transmission, because of the new drive for greater energy efficiency. I spoke with Arturo Elias and I spoke with Buzz Hargrove, and I asked if there's anything at all that we might do here in Ontario to stave off this job loss and the elimination of this product. To make a long story short, the answer came back, "No."

My heart goes out to those people. We will continue to work with GM, with all of our auto manufacturers, to find out how we can continue to work together to expand that sector in our province.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, one of the policies of the McGuinty government that you boast about is that you've made investments in General Motors of over $200 million. Is this your so-called successful strategy: General Motors gets over $250 million of Ontario taxpayers' money and then tells over 1,200 manufacturing workers in Windsor, "See ya. We're not going to reinvest in you. We're not going to reinvest in Windsor. We're not going to reinvest in Ontario"? Is this your idea of a successful strategy to maintain manufacturing jobs, when you give GM $250 million and they send 1,200 workers out the door?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As we've worked with our manufacturers, we have in each and every case exacted concessions on the part of the auto manufacturer that are specific to our investment. This was not covered by one of those agreements. We did land a significant new investment in Oshawa. There is a new flex plant there which will sustain workers in that community for the foreseeable future. We will find ways to continue.

I'm sure the leader of the NDP is not saying that we should not sit down with the union and with the manufacturers to see how we can work together. I'm sure he's not saying that we should just give up, because I can tell you that our competition south of the border is not just giving up. We will continue to find ways to work with our manufacturers, to work with the CAW, to bring both sides together, to ensure that our government comes to the table. We continue to hold out an invitation to the federal government to come to the table as well. We will find a bright—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. New question.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Constituents in Thunder Bay–Atikokan and, I'm sure, all across most of Ontario, were very concerned on Friday when they learned that a woman had died on a VIA Rail train and, in fact, six other people were reported to be quite ill. Many of us, I'm sure, were worried that this was perhaps potentially the start of something very serious and remembered back to what we went through in Ontario with the SARS crisis in 2003.

While the minister has discussed often our preparation for another potential SARS or other pandemic, my constituents would like to know what our government has learned from SARS in 2003.

Hon. George Smitherman: I think, as many of us had an opportunity to bear witness to in circumstances emerging on that train in northern Ontario, we could see in a certain sense that the behavioural reflexes changed substantially. This is the best example of the lessons learned from SARS being well applied. We have to thank those health professionals but, more broadly, those who were operating the train, those involved in emergency management and emergency services, and the police service. We have to be grateful for a reaction which, at the heart of it, demonstrates an abundance of caution on behalf of the broad public.

We're very, very saddened by the unfortunate death and for the inconvenience, more broadly, that was caused, but at the heart of it we really must see that this is the new normal in the province of Ontario shaped by SARS. People responded in a fashion that was designed to protect us all, and we should be very grateful for their actions.

1130

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'd also like to thank all the emergency personnel, local public health units and hospitals for their quick actions. It's always difficult to put yourself on the front lines, not knowing what every emergency might bring. I know these people are on the front lines of our health care system, and they deserve all the credit for their hard work and dedication and for keeping Ontarians healthy and safe.

However, Minister, many of our constituents are very concerned that Ontario may not be prepared for a pandemic or another SARS. My constituents want to know what we have done to prepare Ontario for the possibility of another pandemic.

Hon. George Smitherman: I think that the behaviour, the vigilance, of the public is really the strongest defence in these circumstances. But further, we've been working to enhance public health: We've doubled the spending;

we've made Ontario a leader in pandemic preparedness—other jurisdictions are seeking to follow some of our advice; we've substantially stockpiled anti-viral supplies and equipment; we're in the midst of purchasing 55 million N95 respirators/masks to protect our health care workers; we've distributed 15,000 infection control kits to front-line health care providers; we've created Ontario's stand-alone public health agency; and we've established PIDAC, the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. These are all evidence of enforcing our capacity to address these public health challenges.

I want to thank the honourable member for his question and, one more time, thank all of those professionals and those dedicated individuals who responded so well in what seemed like very trying circumstances.

RED TAPE REDUCTION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. The high cost of doing business in Ontario continues to be a significant factor contributing to the province's economic slowdown, yet this government seems indifferent to the financial burden placed on Ontario businesses by the increasing amount of red tape. The current regulatory burden costs businesses some $13 billion every year in Ontario. During the election campaign, the McGuinty government promised to remove one regulation for every new regulation it introduced. Minister, my question is very simple: How many regulations has this government eliminated since making this promise?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: To the Minister of Labour, please.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to respond to that question. The Premier has indeed given myself, as Minister of Labour, the responsibility to look at the regulatory burden across the gambit of our government, and I'm looking forward to undertaking that challenge.

The member is quite right: This is an issue that is important to our business community. This government and our Premier are very committed to reducing the regulations on businesses. In our recent finance statement, we put forward a suggestion—in fact, a plan—to bring in what we call a cap-and-trade program, so that every regulation that the government passes will have to be followed by a regulation that's taken out. I can tell you that that particular plan will be in place very soon.

Mr. Norm Miller: I asked a very simple question: How many regulations have been removed? There was no answer to that question.

At a time when the province is experiencing a serious economic slowdown, the red tape burden on Ontario business is out of control. Some 63% of small businesses in this province say that the current regulatory burden significantly reduces their business productivity; 64% say that their regulatory burden has increased since 2003, when this government took office.

Red tape is a hidden tax on business, yet there is no attempt by this government to control it and no action to manage the size of the regulatory workload. The government said it would stop the increase of Liberal red tape. Will the government publish a regulatory account showing that it has kept this commitment? I might point out that British Columbia has done that and has reduced red tape by some 42% since 2001. Will you publish a regulatory account showing that you have kept this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Labour?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Over the last four years, we've made a great deal of progress when it comes to reducing the regulatory burden. For instance—and the Minister of Small Business was very directly responsible for this—we've eliminated 24% of government forms in a number of ministries for small businesses that deal directly with government. We've brought in a BizPal program with a one-stop shop for business licences and permits. We've brought in a 45-day processing period for our Next Generation of Jobs Fund. There are a number of other things that we've done to reduce that regulatory burden.

But we feel—as I'm sure the member opposite does, as I'm sure all members of this Legislature and our business community in general feel—that there's more we need to do. That's why the Premier has asked us, as a cabinet, to look at all the ways that we can reduce the regulatory burden on business. I'm quite confident that, while we are at best practice in many areas, by the time we're done, we'll be one of the premier practices in—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PUBLIC HEALTH

M^me^ France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. I'm proud of the work the Sudbury and District Health Unit and the Porcupine Health Unit, as well as all of the emergency personnel, did on Friday morning in Foleyet, in the northern part of my riding.

However, one aspect still troubles me. At a Friday afternoon press conference here at Queen's Park, when asked who ordered the train to be quarantined, the chief medical officer of health said, "We're still trying to ascertain where that decision was made." Can the Premier tell us who made the decision to quarantine the VIA Rail train in Foleyet?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: I appreciate the question from the honourable member. It's nice to see that others are acknowledging the good work that was done. I don't have the direct answer to the honourable member's question.

But in response to all events like this that occur, given that there are different organizations and hundreds of individuals involved, what we do is do a trace-back on the way the event unfolded, seeking at all times to apprise ourselves of areas where information would have been more helpfully made available, and to be able to update our plans as we go forward. I think I would look

forward to an opportunity to provide the member with a greater degree of information as it's forthcoming.

M^me^ France Gélinas: That does nothing to make me feel more reassured. We are in post-SARS. We've just heard about all the compliments that came from this side of the House and that side of the House.

The people at the scene responded really quickly, and responded well, to a quarantine order. Nobody knows who ordered it and why. Shouldn't we have a clear line of command, when we have an outbreak, as to who has the power to order those things, how they should be done and how they should be communicated? Can the Premier or the minister tell us who should have been in charge of that chain of command?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member asks a very detailed question, and a very good question indeed. I have already told the honourable member that I'll be seeking to get that information and all that much more.

But at the heart of it, the question is not, "Was that decision made?"; the question is, "Did dozens and dozens of different people, working together for a variety of organizations, make decisions that were appropriate in the context? Did they make the decisions without checking with head office, or what have you, in a way that sought to protect the people in the province of Ontario?" All of the evidence that's in is that they did, and we should be grateful for it.

In each of these, there are individual details to learn and to better apply as we go forward. That's exactly the circumstance. You don't know much.

VETERANS

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. Sixty-three years ago, the allied forces declared victory in Europe, ending World War II. Canada's contribution to the allied war effort was significant. As a nation of only 11 million people, one million Canadian men, women and aboriginals served in the war. Almost half were from Ontario. Many did not return, but all served with duty and honour so that we could live in peace and freedom today.

Victory in Europe Day was recently observed, on May 7. Would the minister tell us how our government is honouring and remembering our military heroes who proudly served our country and our province in World War II?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I thank my colleague for the question. It was an opportunity to join with students, residents and veterans at the cenotaph in Barrie as we commemorated the 63rd anniversary of VE day, Victory in Europe Day.

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Honouring veterans is very important, and it is the conviction of all of us that, while we do so on November 11—certainly something we will always continue to do—there is a need to broaden that perspective and to honour our veterans on more than just that one day. That's why the government has partnered with the Dominion Institute to honour veterans by sponsoring what they're calling Veteran Appreciation Days across Ontario.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Ontarians made significant contributions in not just the Second World War but also in World War I and the Korean War. Indeed, more than 1.5 million Canadians served in the three wars. Sadly, more than 110,000 did not come home.

I'm pleased to hear that residents in 10 different communities across Ontario will be expressing their appreciation to our veterans outside of remembrance week. Can the minister please inform the House which communities will host Veteran Appreciation Days?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Thank you for this very good supplementary. We began in Barrie last week, but the communities across Ontario who will be commemorating Veteran Appreciation Day are Brampton, Cornwall, Dryden, Elliot Lake, Markham, St. Catharines, Sarnia, Timmins, Waterloo and, of course, as I said, Barrie.

What this does, in addition to expressing gratitude to our veterans, is it gives the veterans the opportunities to tell their stories—stories that need to be told to our young people, who are so anxious to learn them, stories that will disappear, as our veterans inevitably will.

This is an opportunity that the Dominion Institute, receiving government funds of $100,000, has taken. They've done a wonderful job in the past and they did a tremendous job there in the city. We had a wonderful reception, an opportunity to hear some of those stories.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier, and it has to do with the distressing news coming out of Windsor today with respect to the GM plant: 1,400 jobs will be lost in that company, according to the release I have here. This is another kick in the stomach to a city that's already under stress.

In my earlier question to you today, talking about 207,000 manufacturing jobs lost under your watch, I had described the situation in manufacturing as a crisis. It's a crisis that you don't want to acknowledge is occurring in this province.

I am once again asking you: What is your plan to deal with this crisis? What are you planning to do to deal with what is an immediate crisis, impacting not just Windsor but many other communities in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There is a real challenge before us; I don't think anybody's denying that. I think where there is some debate is on what is the best way to address that. We're doing that in a way that I think is in keeping with the values of the people of Ontario. That's why we have put forward a five-point plan. I remind my colleague opposite about our five-point plan

They embrace a one-point plan. They think the only thing that we can do to help people who are losing their jobs is to cut business taxes. We see it differently. In addition to reducing business taxes, we are investing in

innovation and in infrastructure, we are investing in business partnerships, and we continue to invest in the skills and education of our people. We think that's a comprehensive plan that, as I say, is in keeping with our values, and it's continuing to have some real impact as we continue to create more jobs than we lose in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The impact, as we heard today, is 1,400 jobs. Two weeks ago, it was 1,000 jobs in Oshawa. Under our watch, when people worked in the auto sector, the question was, "Do I have to work overtime?" Today the question is, "Will I have a job?"

I spoke a few months ago to the president of a company that has six manufacturing operations in this province. He told me quite clearly that if they had to make location decisions today, they would not locate those operations in the province of Ontario. This has to do with competitiveness; we know that. You're getting that kind of advice from Dr. Roger Martin. Again, you're ignoring that. It has to do with the increasing burden of regulation in this province. We know what's happening with the WSIB. We also know, with respect to tax rates, that we are one of the highest-taxed business jurisdictions in North America, clearly. We also see the growth of government under your watch. These are sending out all of the wrong messages in terms of investment and job growth in this province. When are you going to have a meaningful plan—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just to inform my colleague, when it comes to private investment, for example, in R & D, 52% of all Canadian business R & D investment is made by Ontario businesses. We continue to lead all provinces in Canada in new businesses created. When it comes to venture capital investment, nearly one half of Canadian venture capital comes to Ontario. When it comes to foreign venture capital, 58% comes to Ontario.

I referenced a moment ago our five-point plan, including our continuing investments in infrastructure, and there is some good news for the people of Windsor. We're making an investment there, together with our federal partners, of $1.6 billion in our new Windsor-Essex Parkway; that's going to create 12,000 construction jobs in that community. We think this is exactly what the doctor ordered. We need it right now, and that's why we're going to move ahead with that as quickly as we possibly can.

DRIVER EDUCATION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you'll know that a number of non-accredited truck driving schools are promoting themselves as a quick and easy way to get an AZ driver's licence. In fact, I've got some ads here from last week's paper where they're saying that for 500 bucks you can get an AZ licence, get into an 18-wheeler, a fully loaded 18-speed, and drive the highways of Ontario. I would presume that that is not done very safely. This is all being allowed because under the Private Career Colleges Act there's a whole bunch of loopholes. In fact, your own ministry points out these loopholes to anybody who wants to use them.

My question is, are you prepared to give a commitment to this House today that we close the loopholes and make sure that driver training is something that is taken seriously and that we don't put the motoring public at risk?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Good question. He has some good questions that he asks in the House from time to time.

When we found this to be a challenge, we actually addressed this challenge. I'm working with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Their role in this is to update all of the curriculum and deal with the schools themselves from the curriculum point of view. He is certainly working on that at the present time. My ministry officials and his ministry officials are having some interesting discussions about that with the hope of improving the system.

Although I could wait for the supplementary to say this, we as well have changed. For instance, at one time you could get a licence but not while driving an 18-wheeler when taking your test, and eventually you could get an 18-wheeler licence.

Hon. Michael Bryant: What about now?

Hon. James J. Bradley: You won't be able to do that now because we've made the necessary changes to ensure that doesn't happen.

But I know he has an excellent supplementary, so I won't say everything now.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Frankly, the problem is not with your ministry. In fact, your ministry has done some of the things that needed to be done in order to address this issue. The problem, however, is with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is responsible for the regime that gives these schools their licensing. The problem is that the act is full of loopholes. Anybody who wants to set up a driving school and promise somebody an AZ licence for 200 bucks or 700 bucks can do so, get around all of the loopholes and hence put people on the roads who shouldn't be there. I know you have a challenge because I know from a meeting that happened last week that it was said by ministry staff at training, colleges and universities, "There was no political mood to clean up bad training in the province." My question to you, Premier, is the same: Will you get your Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to do what needs to be done to plug up these loopholes?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The answer is yes, we're working on it. I know you like to hear good news, and this is good news. The former minister who sits across from me has asked questions about this as well and has a

great interest in it. You have a great interest, I have a great interest and so does the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. We're working on it. This will surprise you. Not all the wisdom resides in only one of the political parties. Therefore, I accept your advice. I accept Frank's advice. I accept the advice of all members of the House. We're working on the challenge that's out there, and I will ensure that I'm in communication directly with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to solve these particular matters.

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CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would just clarify the record. In my supplementary, I made reference to "client"; I wanted to say "constituent." Let the record be clarified. Thank you.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank the Clearview Community Church in Stayner for sending this petition to me:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I agree with this petition, and I have signed it.

ALMA COLLEGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas historic Alma College, designed in the High Victorian Gothic style, chartered by an act of Ontario passed March 2, 1877, opened in October 1881, located in the city of St. Thomas, county of Elgin, province of Ontario, has fallen into a dire state of disrepair; and

"Whereas Alma College continues to be threatened with demolition by its current owners despite the efforts of many concerned citizens, alumni and various officials; and

"Whereas a historical plaque commemorating Alma College was unveiled at the college on Thursday, October 28, 1976, by the Ontario Heritage Trust, an agency within the Ministry of Culture and Recreation; and

"Whereas the city of St. Thomas designated Alma College under part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act ... in 1994; and

"Whereas recent amendments ... to the Ontario Heritage Act allow the Minister of Culture to designate property as being provincially significant;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Culture immediately designate Alma College as a building of provincial significance and, in the event of a demolition order being issued for Alma, to immediately intervene by issue of a stop order, and to further identify provincial partnerships and possible funding to protect the existing buildings from further deterioration while financial resources are generated to restore the property to its former glory."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature and pass this petition to page Jack.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities;

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms;

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles;

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56 ... into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition, and I affix my name to it and give it to Cali.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have here a petition signed by a great number of my constituents. The names were gathered by Irene Gagnon.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human

condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I thank you very much for the opportunity to present this petition.

MARY FIX PARK

Mr. Charles Sousa: My petition is to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's about the rehabilitation of Mary Fix Park.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the province of Ontario has acquired public and private lands for the reconstruction and upgrading of the QEW/Hurontario interchange; and ...

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation and highways has stated that excess lands from this project will be conveyed to the city of Mississauga for parkland; and ...

"Whereas this development has caused the loss of century-old trees, natural woodland and wildlife habitat from Mary Fix Park, and has substantially increased noise and traffic to local residences; and

"Whereas the lands on the south and west side of Pinetree Way are no longer the subject of further construction;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, remediate the lands surrounding the south and west areas of Pinetree Way between Hurontario Street and Glenburnie Road by planting trees and constructing berms within this year, and convey all excess lands from the QEW interchange to the city of Mississauga upon completion of the project."

I affix my signature and pass it on to Sheilagh.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I have a petition signed by 241 of my constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in this Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer recognizes the principles on which our province was founded and developed; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature" each day.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas crack houses, brothels and other persistent problem properties undermine a neighbourhood by generating public disorder, fear and insecurity; and

"Whereas current solutions—enforcement measures based on current criminal, civil and bylaws—are slow, expensive, cumbersome and not always successful; and

"Whereas safer communities and neighbourhoods (SCAN) legislation is provincial, civil law which counters the negative impact on neighbourhoods of entrenched drug, prostitution or illegal liquor sales based out of homes and businesses and is being successfully utilized in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and the Yukon; and

"Whereas the following have endorsed SCAN legislation: city of Ottawa, city of Kingston, city of Hamilton, federation of Ontario municipalities, Ottawa Police Service, Ottawa Police Services Board, Ottawa Centre MPP Yasir Naqvi, Ottawa Neighbourhood Watch executive committee, Concerned Citizens for Safer Neighbourhoods, Eastern Ontario Landlord Organization, Friends and Tenants of Ottawa Community Housing, Hintonburg Community Association, Somerset Street Chinatown BIA, Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa and the Dalhousie Community Association;

"Be it resolved that we, the undersigned, urge the province of Ontario to enact safer communities and neighbourhood (SCAN) legislation in Ontario for the benefit of our neighbourhoods and communities."

I agree with the petition. I affix my signature and send it to you by way of page Emily.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

"Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding

formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future."

I appreciate and am happy to sign that.

HIGHWAY 138

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition signed by many residents of my constituency of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas provincial Highway 138 is one of the province's only two-lane roadways within the region that provides the main connection from the international bridge at Cornwall through Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry to Highway 401 and Highway 417. Speed and traffic volumes are of particular concern and may have been contributing factors in numerous collisions and fatalities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To urgently consider measures that will address the serious public safety and traffic hazard concerns on provincial Highway 138."

I'll sign this and send it to the clerks' table with Hannah.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Ajax-Pickering hospital should have full funding for mental health, including beds;

"Whereas this would affect the mental health programs and mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering hospital;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Fully fund the mental health beds and programs at Ajax-Pickering hospital."

I'm pleased to sign in support.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition:

"Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

1200

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact on the quality care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I will affix my signature to that and pass it to Evelyn.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: This is another petition with about 800 names from residents on the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

"Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future."

I'm pleased to sign that and give it to Dario to present to the table.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a second petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

"Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a $20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas, the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a

project that could reach $100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government—it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

"Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

"Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

"That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit."

I will affix my signature to that and pass it to Sheilagh.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas sections 48.9 and 48.10 of the Vital Statistics Act currently protect the privacy of adopted survivors of child abuse who are put up for adoption after being taken from severely abusive birth parents; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's Bill 12 will take away this protection and mandate the Registrar General to hand over the adoptive identity of these victims to their abusive parents once the child turns 19; and

"Whereas the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has said, 'The provincial government should not legally mandate the release of identifying information of victims of violence to the perpetrators of those violent acts'; and

"Whereas the Ontario Victims' Bill of Rights declares that the victim should be treated with respect for their personal dignity and privacy; and

"Whereas these victims are often adopted in family groups, so that when one sibling reaches 19, there may be younger siblings who could also be affected by contact with the abusive birth parents; and

"Whereas no-contact notices have not been in existence in other provinces for long enough to be truly tested;

"We, the undersigned, demand that the McGuinty government and the Minister of Community and Social Services stand up for the safety and well-being of these severely abused individuals and reinstate a one-way disclosure veto to be filed by the children's aid society so that their abusive birth parents cannot find out the victim's adopted name without their permission."

I'm pleased to sign this in support.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Mike Colle: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

"Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present...; and

"Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support" this legislation; and

Whereas other parts of the world like California and Puerto Rico have already joined jurisdictions in banning smoking;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under."

I support this petition and give it to page Bilaal.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House is recessed until 1 o'clock.

The House recessed from 1205 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FIBROMYALGIA AND CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME AWARENESS DAY

Mr. Frank Klees: It's my privilege to declare May 12 Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Awareness Day. May 12 was chosen to memorialize the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the English nurse who inspired the founding of the International Red Cross. Nightingale herself contracted a paralyzing illness in her mid-thirties and spent the last 50 years of her life bedridden. Despite her illness, she founded the first-ever school of nursing. It is fitting that this determined woman now shines as a ray of inspiration and hope to victims of fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue stress syndrome.

These illnesses are characterized by cognitive problems, chronic muscle and joint pain, poor stamina and many other symptoms. They have been afflicting people in alarming numbers, and today, over a million Canadians have been diagnosed with fibromyalgia and CFS. Many victims are left in such a weak state that they cannot even feed or bathe themselves.

To find a cure for this illness, the public must work in tandem with the government, and especially with the medical establishment, to remove remaining misunderstandings about fibromyalgia and CFS.

Today, a number of victims of fibromyalgia join us in this chamber to send a clear public message that it is time to move forward to find a cure. That time is now.

I extend a special welcome to Giselle Imbrogno and the York region fibromyalgia and CFS wellness support group, and Dr. Allison Bested, who will be available in the media studio at 2 p.m. to provide information on this important issue.

MOTHER'S DAY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Yesterday, people in many countries of the world celebrated Mother's Day. Although this modern tradition dates back to 100 years ago, when it was formalized in the United States, I can safely say that mothers have been cherished for their capacity to love unconditionally and for their loyalty and nurturing since the dawn of time. Mothers are the lynchpin of society. It is fitting to recognize mothers' contributions to our lives.

On this day, we also think of mothers who have lost their children, whether in war or due to a senseless act of violence. Our thoughts go out to them. We also think about single mothers, who courageously face often daunting challenges in raising their children. Their commitment to their children knows no boundary, and our society is richer for it.

It is important to honour and cherish our mothers each and every day. Their effort is undiminished throughout our lives. Mothers are role models for a kinder and gentler humanity. As Katherine Nelson Davis says in her poem What Is a Mother?, "In each human heart is that one special corner / Which only a mother can fill."

We are grateful to all mothers for their unwavering love and support. It is this love and support which makes us truly compassionate human beings.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Randy Hillier: Tomorrow marks the 16th anniversary of Falun Gong, an exercise of truthfulness, compassion and forbearance. I invite government members to join with me; that is, if they're not too busy banning the Lord's Prayer or creating new nanny-state policies. Unlike those across the aisle, I am against the Chinese oppression of Falun Gong and Tibet.

Last week, the Ottawa tulip festival, in partnership with the embassy of China, banned Falun Gong. That is what the McGuinty government's China junket has brought to Ontario: state-funded censorship. This government gave the tulip festival $300,000, and with it they became the latest voice of silence.

I have watched this government embrace the godless Communists and mock our values with that farce of a trade mission during the Olympic torch relay. While Communist thugs march a flame of silence through China, I will welcome the human rights torch relay in the city of Kingston this weekend.

While this government freely chose to import censorship and export jobs, I choose to export the values of freedom, justice and democracy.

POVERTY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise on behalf of the 41% of children of working families that live in poverty, and in honour of Campaign 2000 and their Work Isn't Working for Ontario Families campaign. I also rise for the millions that have been shut out of the so-called consultations on poverty by the McGuinty government, and have come up with my own five-point plan that wouldn't cost taxpayers a dime. Here we go:

—First of all, raise the minimum wage to $10.25 an hour and to $11 in 2011.

—Pass our bill for card-check certification. Make it easy to unionize. Again, this is a Campaign 2000 call.

—Ensure that severance pay is given to those workers who are laid off. This is simple justice. Again, this is a Campaign 2000 call.

—Spend the federal dollars that we have been given in this province on housing. We're going to lose that money, at least $185 million of it, by next year if we don't.

—Stop clawing back the national child supplement. Instead of this bogus new Ontario child supplement, why not give the money directly to the children that the fed sends us?

The time to talk about poverty is over. The time to act to reduce poverty is absolutely right now.

WORLD PARTNERSHIP WALK

Mr. Reza Moridi: This spring, tens of thousands of Canadians in cities across the country will join the 24th annual World Partnership Walk, Canada's largest annual event dedicated to increasing awareness and raising funds to help fight global poverty.

The walk is an initiative of Aga Khan Foundation Canada, a not-for-profit, non-denominational development agency. All proceeds of the walk go directly to international development programs that seek to improve health care, education and rural livelihoods while strengthening community-based organizations in some of the poorest parts of Asia and Africa.

The walk will take place in nine cities. Overall, some 70,000 walkers and sponsors are expected to get involved, along with 900 corporate supporters. Over the last 23 years, the walk has raised over $40 million. In Toronto, the walk will take place starting at Metro Hall on May 25 at 11 a.m.

Our page Bilaal Rajan has been participating in the walk annually over the past seven years, and he has sincerely invited all my fellow members to join him in support of eliminating global poverty at the World Partnership Walk.

C. DIFFICILE

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to remind this government that the taxpayers forced to pay your health tax will not sit idly by as the Minister of

Health refuses necessary support and funding to Ontario hospitals battling C. difficile.

Minister Smitherman, your words continue to ring hollow to the families who have lost loved ones on your watch. May I remind you that time after time, in this very chamber, you tell the people of Ontario that you have a pandemic plan, that funding is increased and the SARS recommendations are being implemented? Minister, hospitals are completely on their own as they struggle to manage this outbreak, and yet you have the gall to continue to blame front-line staff while withholding the funding and support that they need to manage and contain this outbreak.

We support Ontario Ombudsman André Marin as he calls for a province-wide public inquiry. Mr. Marin has called the 62 deaths "an absolute human tragedy of the worst kind," and that the province's reaction has been inexcusably lax.

Today, Minister, you had the gall to stand in your place and list all of the supplies and stockpiles that your ministry has in readiness for a pandemic. That is cold comfort to families who have lost loved ones.

Everyone knows that there's an outbreak now. Why don't you, Mr. Minister, know that there's an outbreak now?

ÉCOLE SECONDAIRE CATHOLIQUE DE PLANTAGENET

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Today, I wish to share with you how proud I am of our high school pupils. Let me tell you, we should hear about the wonderful things they do at Plantagenet high school.

En effet, samedi dernier, le 11 mai, j'ai assisté au spectacle l'E.S.P.rit d'Show Musique, présenté par l'École secondaire catholique de Plantagenet. C'était un spectacle de musique et de danse d'une durée de deux heures. Laissez-moi vous dire que ça bougeait. Plus de 1 600 personnes ont assisté aux trois représentations de ce spectacle, et je tiens à les remercier pour leur encouragement.

L'École secondaire catholique de Plantagenet en est à son huitième spectacle annuel du genre, et le thème de cette année était « Amalgame ». Chaque année donc, depuis 2001, les élèves de la neuvième à la douzième année, la plupart inscrits dans le programme de musique de l'école, passent des auditions, et cette année plus de 50 se sont exécutés sur scène.

Je tiens à souligner les efforts de trois personnes clés dans ce spectacle : le coordonnateur de l'événement, Martin Villeneuve, le professeur de musique de l'école, Jocelyn Godin, et M^me^ Anik Lalonde, professeure de français et responsable du volet de danse du spectacle. Il est à noter que M. Godin est un joueur de violon très réputé au sein du groupe Trans Akadi, et un ancien membre du groupe célèbre franco-ontarien Deux Saisons. Je tiens à souligner les efforts de tous ces gens, en incluant M^me^ Sylvie Labrèche, directrice de l'École secondaire catholique de Plantagenet.

Félicitations à tous les participants et au Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien pour leur appui continu de cette belle initiative.

1310

NURSING WEEK

Mr. Charles Sousa: This week is Nursing Week in Ontario, and it provides a great opportunity to celebrate those who take up this very important vocation.

Every day we look to nurses to provide help and hope to Ontarians who need it at times in their lives when they're most vulnerable. Nurses provide invaluable advice to new mothers; they help our elderly live with dignity; they are especially sensitive to those in their final years; and they provide us with incredible insight into issues such as wait times, access and quality of care.

It is because of these reasons that over the past four years our government has invested more than $700 million in new nursing initiatives. For example, Ontario is among the few jurisdictions in the world that offers the nursing graduate guarantee—guaranteeing a full-time job opportunity for every new nursing graduate. Because of this program, more than 3,200 new nursing graduates have been hired into seven-and-a-half-month full-time work placements; 86% of these graduates who have completed the program have gained full-time employment.

We have also developed, and continue to expand, the Grow Your Own Nurse Practitioner program, which supports registered nurses who are in training to become nurse practitioners with additional education and skills.

We are extremely proud of Ontario's nurses. Unlike the Conservatives, you won't catch this government saying that nurses have gone the way of the hula hoop. We respect our nurses and the work they do to help the people of Ontario.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: According to a StatsCan release late last week, the Ontario economy generated over 12,000 net new jobs in April, with the vast majority of these being full-time. The release went on to say that Ontario employment is up by a solid 123,700 jobs over the first four months of this year, compared to the same period last year. The Globe and Mail also pointed out, "Ontario's employment has risen 2.2% over the past year, slightly above the national average of 2.1%." This is positive news for Ontario, and can only propel the province forward with more confidence in its economy. It will also propel our government forward as we continue to invest in Ontarians.

We recognize the need for investment in growing areas of the economy with the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, in which the government will partner with businesses to create green jobs through green technology.

But we also appreciate that Ontarians are looking to their government to continue to invest in our health care system, skills training programs, our publicly funded education system, our social programs and our environ-

ment. We will not follow in the Conservatives' footsteps and make devastating cuts to the programs and services that Ontarians depend on. Ontarians deserve better than that. This government will continue to work for them and continue to make Ontario a great place to live.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

POLICE WEEK

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: This week, May 11 to 17, Ontario celebrates Police Week. It is a week during which police services across the province engage with their communities to highlight the work that police do and focuses on a particular aspect of enhancing community safety.

It is also an opportunity for us in the Legislature to show our appreciation to the police for all they do to keep our communities safe. So I am delighted today to rise to pay tribute to police services all over the province for the work they do on behalf of all Ontarians. Ontario's communities are safer and our province is stronger because of our excellent police services and a government that's committed to supporting them in the challenging job that they do.

We were reminded of how challenging that job can be and the risks that police officers are often exposed to as we commemorated our fallen police officers at the ceremony of remembrance last week. Sadly, we mourned the passing of Detective Constable Robert James Plunkett of the York Regional Police Service, who paid the ultimate sacrifice last August in the line of duty. We honour those who, like Detective Constable Plunkett, face great risks to protect us. As we honour their memory, we salute their families and express our gratitude for their sacrifice.

Community safety has always been a priority for the McGuinty government. That's why we funded the Safer Communities–1,000 Officers Partnership program, putting 1,000 additional officers on the streets of Ontario since we came to office, and that's why we made the community policing partnerships program permanent, with annualized funding. Together, these programs add up to an annual investment of $68 million by our government and support more than 2,000 additional police officers across Ontario.

As you know, the federal government has similarly promised more police officers for Canada, but our government is disappointed with its follow-through so far. Ottawa has announced $400 million to help recruit 2,500 new front-line officers, with Ontario's share being $156 million over five years. We believe that that program is inadequate. Ontario is advocating for full funding for our fair share of the total number of available officers. We are also insisting that the funding be made permanent so that communities can count on having these additional officers beyond the five years that the federal government is proposing to fund them. We will continue to lobby for these changes. It's what our policing partners want and what the people of Ontario expect us to do.

The theme for Police Week 2008 is Working with Today's Youth to Build Safer Communities. It highlights the efforts by police officers to engage young people in working to enhance community safety. This is an important outreach activity and is wholly supported by the McGuinty government.

Half of the 1,000 new police officers hired under the Safer Communities–1,000 Officers Partnership program are assigned to community policing, including school visits, street patrols and increased traffic enforcement. The remaining 500 new officers are assigned duties related to six priority areas, including youth crime and protecting children from Internet luring and pornography.

There are 103 police officers dedicated to addressing youth crime. These officers respond to incidents of youth crime and violence, and work with students in schools. They participate in outreach programs that focus on prevention, early detection and intervention for youth at risk or in conflict with the law.

In addition, our Safe Schools pilot project target is an investment in safer schools. The project fosters positive interaction between police and students in grades 6 to 8 in Toronto, Hamilton and London. Reaching youth in these formative years will assist them in making the right choices when faced with negative peer influence and violence.

We continue to work with police in a number of ways to ensure they have the tools to do the job. The McGuinty government maintains ongoing dialogue with the representatives of police organizations through our police services advisory committee and other contacts, such as Queen's Park Day, observed here recently.

The partnership between the McGuinty government and Ontario's police services is a positive one, and it's highly effective. Together, we make important progress. Ontario's overall crime rate is now the lowest it's been in 30 years. Since 2003, Ontario has had the lowest crime rate of all of Canada's provinces and territories. Support for Ontario's police services has never been higher. According to a recent public survey, police officers enjoy a trust rating of 84%—the highest since 2002. That's a tribute to the work of the dedicated professional police officers serving communities throughout Ontario.

1320

In celebrating Police Week, we recognize and applaud the contributions of our provincial, municipal and First Nations police officers. I invite my colleagues in the House to join me in this expression of gratitude and appreciation to police officers in every community of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

POLICE WEEK

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond today to the comments made by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services on the observance of Police Week here in our province. I too would like to congratulate and thank the 31,000 front-line police officers who protect our streets, roads, waterways and communities across our great province.

The minister mentioned police memorial week last week, and I wanted again to pay my respects to the family of Constable Plunkett, whose name was added to the wall last week. He was a resident of Simcoe county. He lived in the small community of Midhurst. I got an opportunity to meet his family, and I just want to pass on that we are with them in these very difficult times.

Another person I wanted to congratulate today is Mr. Ron Midell. Ron has been the vice-president of the Ontario Provincial Police Association for the last few years, and just last week, he was chosen as the new CEO of the Police Association of Ontario. He'll be replacing Bruce Miller, a good friend of all Ontarians who represents the 31,000 front-line officers. Bruce is retiring later on in the summer, and I'm sure there will be a tribute for Bruce a little later on in the year. Ron is worthy of this job and will do an excellent job representing police officers in our province.

Because I have the OPP general headquarters in my riding, I attend a lot of OPP events. In fact, last weekend I was at three different retirements for OPP officers. On top of that, this coming weekend we'll be dedicating a 32-foot boat, the leading OPP boat out of the southern Georgian Bay detachment. It will be called the Thomas P. Coffin in memory of an officer with the OPP who was brutally murdered a few years ago.

I want to mention that in our riding, we're joining with a lot of other ridings across the country—I believe 20—and we're going to have a barbecue and reception on May 25 to support our protective services. That includes police, fire, paramedics and, of course, military. Myself and the federal member will be hosting that at the Coldwater Curling Club coming up on May 25.

The minister spoke for a few moments about the 1,000 cops program, and he talked about full funding. That's where I've got a disagreement with the minister. To begin with, this government has never fully funded one officer. The most they put in is 35%, which is $35,000 towards an officer who costs $100,000 for the taxpayers. Our government put in 1,000 new police officers, and, quite frankly, we on this side of the House take credit for adding the 1,000 officers the Liberal government put in because we put the pressure to them, over and over again, with press releases and statements in this House. Finally, they caved in and added the 1,000 officers. Then they have the gall, Mr. Speaker—if you can actually believe it—to stand in this House today and blame the federal government for not contributing full and sustainable funding to the 2,500 officers program. The federal government does not have the responsibility to fund police officers in Ontario. It was a kick-start program to help you, and you stand there and slap them in the face every time you get a chance. There's $156 million on the table, and this minister has not yet decided how he'll spend one penny of that.

He should be adding new police officers—200 this year. When you start having 600 OPP officers on a weekend spent between Caledonia and Deseronto, you need new officers because you're taking those officers out of the other communities in the province.

Don't stand and blame the federal government anymore. Stand with the federal government; help them provide those 1,000 new cops for the province of Ontario. Do it this year; get 200 this year. Over five years, you'll have another 1,000 officers, and half of those officers can be fully funded and go to the Ontario Provincial Police.

POLICE WEEK

Mr. Peter Kormos: I am pleased and proud, on behalf of New Democrats here at Queen's Park, to participate in this tribute to Ontario's police officers, as we commence the first working day of Police Week in Ontario.

New Democrats know full well the important role that police officers play in keeping us, our families and our communities safe and secure, and the great sacrifices of police officers in the course of doing that.

Before I go any further, I want to make sure that I make special note of the extraordinary difficulties faced in northern Ontario by native policing services. I have had occasion, like so many of you, to visit communities like Kashechewan, Peawanuck and Attawapiskat. Gilles Bisson, our member from Timmins–James Bay, represents those communities. Howard Hampton, the member for Kenora–Rainy River, represents similar communities in northwestern Ontario. I've witnessed, first-hand, committed police officers working with the most serious and dangerous levels of understaffing, with equipment that is either non-existent or broken: boats without motors; snowmobiles without tracks; jail cells without doors. So we've got police officers in those remote northern communities putting themselves at as much risk in the course of the performance of their duties on a day-by-day basis, and with as much commitment and professionalism, as any other police officer in this province who doesn't have the most fundamental of tools in terms of doing effective and, more importantly, safe policing.

Kashechewan, of course, is noteworthy because there, there was the tremendous tragedy of the jail fire—I'm hard-pressed to call that a jail; it was a shack, if you will—two deaths and one serious injury of a correctional police officer.

New Democrats agree with police in Ontario, and police note that crime is indeed becoming more sophisticated, more organized and more complex. Criminals are

using cutting-edge technology and, quite frankly, the police tell us that they're hard-pressed to keep pace.

We can't call upon police officers to perform this incredibly difficult, challenging role unless and until we commit ourselves to giving those same police officers the tools and resources that they need to do those jobs. We remain sadly, sorely and dangerously understaffed in terms of police forces across Ontario—big-city Toronto, smaller-town Sudbury, small-town Ontario like Welland and Thorold. It's not only the police staffing; it's the tools that are being made available to them. Police officers have to comply with greater and greater standards, in terms of charter compliance, to ensure that prosecutions are effective, and in the course of doing that, they expend an incredible number of person hours, staff hours. So this government has to commit itself not just to making announcements of one-time-only funding or two-year or three-year funding; communities have to be assured of ongoing, stable funding for the enhanced needs of police services.

It's also incredibly frustrating for police officers to work hard doing an investigation, complying with all of the Criminal Code expectations and the charter expectations, arranging evidence so that it can be prosecuted in a full way and so the course of justice can run its path. So we must reflect on the police corruption charges here in Toronto that were stayed by Judge Nordheimer and the judge's serious criticism of the Ministry of the Attorney General's failure to comply with disclosure requirements. Police officers worked incredibly hard, at great expense to the public, on that investigation, the most serious police corruption investigation in the history of this country. I tell you, police officers aren't pleased when they see their hard work squandered in the course of a stay because the Attorney General didn't do his job.

Gun laws, handguns and the ongoing plague, epidemic, of young people shooting each other with handguns in Toronto—and this government says it takes a tough stand when it comes to handguns. Well, this government didn't take a tough stand when it came to John Snobelen, who pled guilty to possession of an illegal handgun, a Colt revolver, and, more sadly and tragically, its dangerous storage in a bedside table. It's a gun that had been illegally brought into Canada. Does the Attorney General stand up and call for jail time for that offence? No. Indeed, John Snobelen, a friend of former Premiers, gets an absolute discharge, not even a conviction. He doesn't get a slap on the wrist; he got a pat on the back. The Attorney General of this government won't stand up and announce that he intends to appeal that outrageously unacceptable sentence.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to welcome a couple of visitors from Germany. This is their first visit to Canada and their very first day in Toronto. Welcome to Sophie Stroebel and Johannes Helms. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

DEFERRED VOTES

INVESTING IN ONTARIO ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 PERMETTANT D'INVESTIR DANS L'ONTARIO

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 35, Loi autorisant le ministre des Finances à faire des versements aux bénéficiaires admissibles sur les crédits affectés par la Législature et modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la transparence et la responsabilité financières, la Loi sur le ministère du Trésor et de l'Économie et la Loi de 1991 sur le Conseil du Trésor.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1331 to 1336.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Orazietti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Best, Margarett	Gravelle, Michael	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Hoy, Pat	Sergio, Mario
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Smith, Monique
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Smitherman, George
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sousa, Charles
Chan, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	Levac, Dave	Wilkinson, John
Crozier, Bruce	Mangat, Amrit	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Murdoch, Bill
Dunlop, Garfield	Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Elliott, Christine	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Gélinas, France	Kormos, Peter	Sterling, Norman W.
Hampton, Howard	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	Marchese, Rosario	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hillier, Randy	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 47; the nays are 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We now have a deferred vote on government order number 6, a motion moved by Mr. Milloy, allocating time for proceedings on Bill 12, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act in relation to adoption information and to make consequential amendments to the Child and Family Services Act.

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Same vote? Agreed? I heard a no, and some more members have arrived.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1340 to 1345.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Milloy has moved a motion allocating time for proceedings on Bill 12, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act in relation to adoption information and to make consequential amendments to the Child and Family Services Act. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Duncan, Dwight	Orazietti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Ramsay, David
Best, Margarett	Gravelle, Michael	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Hoy, Pat	Sergio, Mario
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Smith, Monique
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Smitherman, George
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sousa, Charles
Carroll, Aileen	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chan, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	Mangat, Amrit	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Mitchell, Carol	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bisson, Gilles	Jones, Sylvia	Prue, Michael
Dunlop, Garfield	Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce
Elliott, Christine	Kormos, Peter	Sterling, Norman W.
Gélinas, France	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Hampton, Howard	Marchese, Rosario	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 50; the nays are 25.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to welcome a few guests in the east and west members' galleries from the York Region Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Wellness Support Group: Mrs. Giselle Imbrogno, Dr. Allison Bested, Dorothy Askew, Lisa Suddard, J.L. Kelley, Mira DiLouya, Cindy Patella, Dino DiCarlo, Bigorch and Associates, Vicky Sterling and others guests associated with them. Welcome.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COSMETIC PESTICIDES BAN ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 SUR L'INTERDICTION DES PESTICIDES UTILISÉS À DES FINS ESTHÉTIQUES

Mr. Gerretsen moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 64, An Act to amend the Pesticides Act to prohibit the use and sale of pesticides that may be used for cosmetic purposes / Projet de loi 64, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les pesticides en vue d'interdire l'usage et la vente de pesticides pouvant être utilisés à des fins esthétiques.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? Minister of the Environment.

1350

Hon. John Gerretsen: Today, I rise to speak about Bill 64, our government's proposed Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act. If passed, it would help lead to a safer, healthier environment for the children and families of Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind the House of the principal goal of our government's proposed legislation.

Interjection.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Yes. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Oakville.

I would like to remind the opposition members that, if passed, this bill would lead to a safer, healthier environment for the children and families of Ontario.

Interjection: What studies?

Hon. John Gerretsen: We will get to the studies momentarily.

It is to ban the sale and use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes, and by that I mean non-essential purposes on lawns, gardens, parks and schoolyards across Ontario.

We propose this ban for several reasons. First and foremost, it's a matter of health. We all know that children like to run outdoors, particularly in the summer. They play and explore, and may simply be too young to

read signs that a lawn has just been sprayed. This makes them more likely to come in direct contact with pesticides that may harm vulnerable young bodies that are still in the process of developing, and potentially impact their health over the long term.

Interjection.

Hon. John Gerretsen: It's very interesting to hear the interjections from the members opposite. I only have one question for them: Are they going to support this bill or are they not going to support this bill? That is the real issue here.

As the Ontario College of Family Physicians has stated—listen to this: "The cumulative effects of being exposed to many different pesticides over a lifetime represent an unquantified and unacceptable risk to all Canadian children." It is all about an unacceptable risk to Canadian children. Our government simply will not take this risk.

We propose this legislation as part of our broader commitment to reduce Ontarians' exposure to toxic chemicals, whether they are in our air, water, land or consumer products.

Interjections.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I wish they would let the member from Trinity–Spadina ask a question occasionally, so he could actually ask some of the questions he undoubtedly has on his mind, rather than having to resort to this kind of heckling.

This legislation has been developed in consultation with stakeholders, the public and many groups, which I shall mention shortly. Pesticide Free Ontario is a coalition of citizen groups supporting the elimination of urban pesticides. It has called for a province-wide ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides. This has been supported by health and environmental organizations such as the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecojustice, the Ontario College of Family Physicians, the Ontario Public Health Association, the Organic Landscape Alliance and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, as well as Toronto public health and many other public health organizations and agencies. We are taking the appropriate action.

At the same time, we want the approach to be balanced and fair. If passed, this bill would ban the cosmetic use of pesticides—that is, the non-essential use of pesticides—in favour of more natural methods of lawn and garden care, yet, it also proposes certain exceptions.

The agricultural sector would not be impacted by this ban, because we know that farmers already adhere to strict rules on the use, handling, storage and application of pesticides that are necessary to protect and enhance food production. Forestry would also be exempted. Again—I'd like the opposition members to listen to this—rules already exist for pesticide use, which is essential both to protect trees from pests and to control competing vegetation, particularly where conifer regeneration is affected.

Our proposed legislation also provides an exemption for golf courses. However, golf courses may only utilize this exemption if they meet tough new conditions and set out management plans that will be further detailed in regulation. Our intention would be to require golf courses to develop and implement strong, integrated pest management plans that would see reductions in pesticide use over time and reduce the impact of pesticides on our environment.

This bill is all about taking unnecessary risks away from our children. They are much more likely to play in their front yards, their backyards, their playgrounds at schools, than either on golf courses or within the agricultural sector of our society.

Just as banning cosmetic pesticide use is a prudent step forward in improving human health and well-being, it would also improve the health of our environment.

Let's look in particular at water. Safe, clean water is a priority for this government. It is essential for building and supporting a strong, healthy and prosperous province with a high quality of life for one and all. From the Clean Water Act to the Safeguarding and Sustaining Ontario's Water Act to proposing strong protections for Lake Simcoe and the Great Lakes, we are making historic improvements to water protection throughout this province. Yet there is still more work to be done. There's always more work to be done. Pesticides are a potential threat to our rivers and lakes. Pesticides can run off after rainfall and wind up going through our lakes and rivers. If we could stop cosmetic-use pesticides from being applied in the first place, we could better protect the water resources that are so vital to life and health, for the benefit of our children and for future generations.

A recent Statistics Canada report showed that 34% of households in Ontario report pesticide use; that is one in three. That's 34% of all Ontarian households that, with a switch to green gardening methods, could have a positive effect on their own health and on the health of their neighbours and of the children in their neighbourhoods.

This change will also benefit the health and sustainability of our environment.

If passed, our legislation would encourage this switch. It would help promote a shift toward healthier people and a cleaner, more sustainable environment all across this province.

More and more, people everywhere better understand the links between our everyday actions and the overall health of our environment. We see how what we do in our daily lives can have far-ranging effects on the kind of future we want for our children and our grandchildren. As a direct result of that growing environmental awareness, many Ontarians are already choosing greener alternatives for lawn and garden care.

Our proposed ban is the responsible next step. If passed, it'll be the strongest ban on the use and sale in all of North America.

This move is widely supported by parents, medical experts, businesses, retailers, landscapers and many others.

Indeed, over the past few years, a number of Ontario communities have already acted. The cosmetic use of pesticides is already being phased out. They are banned or restricted in some 33 municipalities across this province, including Toronto, covering 46% of the province. In other words, the 33 municipalities that have banned the use of pesticides represent almost half of the people in Ontario.

Yet our law will go much further than just banning the use of pesticides; it will also ban the sale of pesticides.

We will build on the leadership shown by those forward-thinking municipalities that introduced bans or imposed restrictions on cosmetic-use pesticides over the past number of years.

If passed, our legislation would provide one consistent, comprehensive provincial law to help ensure that all children and families, no matter where they live in Ontario, are equally protected.

As I stated before, we are going further than municipal bylaws currently permit, as we would also be banning the sale of pesticides that may be used for cosmetic or non-essential reasons. It would support the growth of green products and services, encouraging more of the innovation, jobs and business opportunities that this booming sector already brings to our economy.

People want access to products that will protect and sustain the environment. All across this province, entrepreneurs are starting up businesses to develop and supply natural products and lawn care services.

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We know—and I'd really like the members to pay attention to this—that Ontario's environmental industry now contributes almost $8 billion a year to our economy. As a matter of fact, our province is nearing the $1-billion mark in environmental exports, a market that can only grow and gain in importance. Our province is now responsible for almost half of Canada's environment industry revenue. Almost 60,000 highly skilled and dedicated professionals are working here in Ontario to help shape the green economy of the future. Established businesses are innovating and adapting to the wishes of an environmentally conscious public.

Some of our largest companies are already taking action. Loblaws pulled pesticides from their shelves nearly five years ago. Canadian Tire has a plan in place to sell eco-friendly lawn care products and green alternatives. Home Depot has announced that it will voluntarily stop selling traditional pesticides across Ontario by the end of this year. Wal-Mart Canada intends to have high-risk cosmetic-use pesticides off their shelves as well by the end of this year. Ontario's retailers report that customers are making greener, healthier choices for lawn and garden care. We welcome these partnerships in support of a healthier Ontario.

Our proposed ban has acted as a catalyst for progressive corporate leadership, not just here but across the country. Together, we have a strong message to share: A healthy and beautiful lawn and garden is in no way dependent on pesticides. There are thousands of households and businesses across this province that maintain green yards and fine gardens using nothing but organic or green methods: from using preventive strategies that help stop pest problems before they start, to choosing plants that are most appropriate for each garden environment, to composting, mulching and simply letting nature do its job through biological control. There are plenty of ways to ensure a healthy yard. I've also heard it said that there is nothing wrong with the occasional dandelion.

There is an abundance of information available, on the Internet and elsewhere, on green gardening. The Royal Botanical Gardens, as well as dozens of organizations, gardeners and municipalities, all provide tips on environmentally and people-friendly alternatives to pesticides. My own ministry, the Ministry of the Environment, has just launched a website that provides a wealth of ideas, and I would encourage members of this House and all of those people who may be watching or listening to visit www.ontario.ca/pesticides for information on how to grow pesticide-free grass and gardens. Help ensure that our children and families are not exposed to chemicals that may cause them illness or harm.

Our government will work closely with our partners to educate Ontarians about the ban and to promote healthy, environmentally friendly alternatives to lawn and garden care, with the addition of fines to ensure compliance issued as a last resort.

We will be working and collaborating with key stakeholders and all those interested, whether they're schools and colleges, municipalities, gardening retailers, service providers, health units and health associations, to deliver a comprehensive education and outreach program to Ontarians on alternative methods of lawn and garden care.

We've also heard from groups who are already stepping forward and stating their interest in partnering with us on education and outreach. They include the Canadian Cancer Society, the Ontario Public Health Association, Landscape Ontario and, as I mentioned before, the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington.

All Ontarians should feel confident, wherever they go in the province, that their environment is clean and as free as possible from unnecessary contaminants that can impact our health and particularly our children's health. That's why our government has introduced this proposed legislation that would ban the sale and the cosmetic, non-essential use of pesticides, with the intention that, if this is passed, we anticipate having the ban take effect in the spring of 2009.

We are taking the strongest possible approach when it comes to the protection of Ontario's most vulnerable population. That's why we are recommending the immediate implementation of the proposed ban. I realize that the actual timing will depend on the passing of the legislation by the Legislature. Any bill that's presented here, of course, is always subject to the will of the Legislature.

Let me just say that we did consider a three-year phase-in period for the proposed ban, which is supported

by several stakeholders and conforms to the experience of several other jurisdictions that have implemented bans or restrictions on the use of pesticides. While we fully recognize the concerns of the retail and landscape sectors, the proposed approach does not include a phase-in over several years in order to reduce the potential risk to human health as soon as possible. If there's an unnecessary risk to children, we should deal with it as soon as possible. Three years simply isn't good enough.

The government is taking prudent measures to reduce any potential risk associated with the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. If Bill 64 is passed, a draft regulation would be developed and posted for public consultation on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry. As a matter of fact, the proposed bill is currently posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry and we are getting solid feedback.

I should tell you that when we posted our intent to bring this bill forward earlier this year, we received over 6,000 replies, with more than the 90% of the responses in favour of the bill. These were not form responses; these were individual responses from individuals and organizations. So 90% of the people that we heard from when we put out the policy document earlier this year were totally in favour of this ban.

Again, if the bill is passed, we will consult with all sectors in drafting the regulations. These regulations will list the pesticides and ingredients that would be banned. Our preliminary pesticide product list has over 300 products that may be used currently for cosmetic purposes on lawns and gardens. It also contains over 80 active ingredients that are contained on the preliminary active ingredient list. Obviously, we're going to consult to see whether or not those lists, from both an ingredient and product viewpoint, are the correct lists. As well, a draft list of products and ingredients is available for discussion on our website as of today.

The amendments to the regulation would also define the exceptions that would be made for agriculture and forestry. It would also prescribe other accepted uses for health or safety issues; for example, to control mosquitoes that might carry the West Nile virus, to control stinging insects such as wasps or to control poison ivy.

The amendments would also set out the prescribed conditions for a golf course to be excepted. Let me stress that again: A golf course could only be excepted once it has filed with us an acceptable management plan as to how they will reduce the use of pesticides over the next number of years.

Let me just read to you some of the positive responses that we've already received.

Connie Uetrecht, the executive director of the Ontario Public Health Association, says the following: "The Ontario Public Health Association is pleased to see a ban on the use and sale of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. This enabling legislation is another positive step the McGuinty government has taken to protect the health of our children and our environment."

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Gideon Forman, the executive director of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, states, "We're delighted the government has listened to our doctors and nurses and introduced a ban on lawn and garden pesticides. We still need to ensure the regulations are good and strong, but Ontario is now positioning itself to be a North American leader in this area."

Peter Robinson, the chief executive officer of the David Suzuki Foundation, says the following: "Ontario is demonstrating leadership by banning the use and sale of lawn and garden pesticides. The measures announced today will help to minimize a needless source of chemical exposures. I'm confident that Ontarians are ready to make the switch to non-toxic gardening techniques to protect their health and the environment."

Sari Merson, of Pesticide Free Ontario, states, "Pesticides Free Ontario is delighted with the swift and decisive action Premier McGuinty's government is taking to protect public health and our environment, by introducing legislation to ban the sale and use of lawn and garden pesticides."

The chief executive officer of the Ontario College of Family Physicians, Jan Kasperski, says, "The Ontario College of Family Physicians solidly supports a province-wide ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides. Our research demonstrates the many health effects associated with pesticides. On behalf of our most vulnerable patients, the children of this province, we are pleased to hear that government has moved so quickly to develop this important legislation."

Doris Grinspun, the executive director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, says, "Ontario children will be better off thanks to this legislation. We're also delighted that the government is moving quickly to implement these laws."

Peter Goodhand, chief executive officer of the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario division, states, "We're very pleased the government is not only banning the use but also the sale of cosmetic pesticides in Ontario. We're especially proud of the tremendous effort of our volunteers and staff who played a significant role advocating for municipal pesticide bylaws. Now with this provincial legislation, all Ontarians will be protected from cancers associated with exposure to certain pesticides. We look forward to more details on the legislation and the development of strong regulations."

The medical officer of health for the city of Toronto, Dr. David McKeown, states, "Since 2004 when the city of Toronto passed its pesticide bylaw, the public and business community has significantly reduced their use of toxic pesticides and embraced more natural methods of lawn and garden care. The provincial plan to ban both pesticide sales and use will ensure the most comprehensive health protection for the public."

David Miller, mayor of the city of Toronto, states, "I applaud the provincial government's new aggressive action to ban the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides. It goes farther than we were able to go in 2004 when we

banned pesticides in the city of Toronto and it makes the job of delivering a cleaner, safer and more healthy environment for Torontonians, and all municipalities in Ontario, easier."

Doug Reycraft, the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, says, "Legislation addressing the cosmetic use of pesticides is consistent with the advice of Ontario's municipalities and AMO. The proposed ban will provide a uniform and province-wide response to an important public policy issue."

I've already talked to you about the retailers who have come onside.

The chair of the Lawncare Commodity Group, Landscape Ontario, Gavin Dawson, says, "The McGuinty government has delivered on its promise with a bill that ensures consistent standards everywhere, which apply equally to professionals servicing our green infrastructure and the do-it-yourself market."

The president of the Organic Landscape Alliance, Mark MacKenzie, states, "The Organic Landscape Alliance is pleased that all Ontarians will now be protected by legislation that was previously only protecting those in select municipalities. OLA looks forward to strong regulations and an effective education program that will empower Ontarians to create healthy and sustainable landscapes with truly organic products."

Anne Mitchell, the executive director of the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, on the day when the legislation was introduced, said, "Congratulations on today's announcement of the provincial ban on the use of pesticides on gardens and lawns. This is an important step. I am pleased that the Ontario government is stepping up its efforts to protect the environment and our health—and particularly our children's health. We are beginning to understand more and more how environmental problems affect our health. We at CIELAP look forward to working with you on our common goal of protecting Ontario's environment—and ultimately the health of its people."

An e-mail that I received on the day the bill was introduced, which I find particularly noteworthy, is one that reads as follows:

"Dear Minister Gerretsen:

"Thank you for sending me the information about the legislation to ban cosmetic use and sale of pesticides in Ontario. Congratulations and thank you on behalf of all Canadians. I can imagine the pressure you received from lobbyists for the pesticide industries but from an ecological and health standpoint, you made the right decision and as the largest province in Canada, you set a standard that I hope will induce the rest of the country to follow. Well done." That was signed by David Suzuki.

You can see that we have heard from people involved in just about every organization that has an interest in this issue in Ontario.

I know that some of the opponents will say that these products have been approved by Health Canada. But of course what Health Canada does when it looks at an individual product is determine whether or not it's an unnecessary risk to children or to individuals. But the word "risk" is still there. It doesn't say the products are safe; it just states that it is not an unnecessary risk.

Very little work has been done on the cumulative effects of all of these different products together. I think that's what this speaks to more than anything else. We simply cannot allow our young children who play on our lawns, backyards, playgrounds and parks to be subjected to unnecessary risks. That's why we're putting this legislation forward.

Finally, with this legislation our government is listening to Ontarians. It would set the framework for a ban that would be among the most rigorous in North America. We are taking action that will help support our people's health and well-being. We are working for a healthier province with clean air, sustainable water and safe water. In doing so, we know that through this bill, this government, on behalf of the people of Ontario, is helping to restore the health of our planet.

Thank you very much. I will now turn it over to my parliamentary secretary, the member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It certainly is a pleasure to join the debate today, second reading on a bill that, if passed, would ban the use of cosmetic pesticides in the province of Ontario. Certainly, as parliamentary assistant to Environment Minister Gerretsen, I'm proud to have this opportunity to stand before the Legislature and speak in support of the proposed ban that would ban the sale and the use of cosmetic pesticides in Ontario.

I think it's a timely piece of legislation. The debate we're having today really has the potential to make an important contribution to the kind of future that I think we all want in Ontario. I am sure that I could probably speak for all members of the House when I say that no matter what party we belong to or where we come from, we basically all want the same things for our families and communities. We want an Ontario that's strong and healthy, with a prosperous economy, a province where our children and grandchildren can grow and succeed in clean and healthy communities.

Ontario's environment minister, the Honourable John Gerretsen, has already spoken in some detail to the proposed ban on cosmetic pesticides in the province. He's clearly stated that the fundamental necessity and the imperative of protecting the health of our children and the health of future generations is something that we hope to achieve as a government by tackling the amount of toxins that currently exist in our environment today. The proposed ban is part of our government's toxins reduction plan for the entire province of Ontario, and we hope it sets an example for others. The overarching goal is easily stated: protecting people's health, regardless of where they live in our province.

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We know that when it comes to the use of cosmetic pesticides, there is an unnecessary risk that's particular and unique to our children's health. We've heard from a number of environmental groups, we've heard from

health organizations, and they strongly support the proposed legislation that's before us today.

I find in my own community of Oakville and throughout the province that people are very aware of the need to take action to reduce the amounts of toxins that currently exist in the environment today, harmful substances that they see going into our land, into our waterways and, indeed, right into the air we all breathe on a daily basis.

The public has responded. Since we first posted our proposal for this ban on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry on January 18 seeking input from all stakeholders, we've received about 6,000 comments, as the minister has spoken to. Close to 90% of those people who sent in a submission to the Environmental Bill of Rights support the proposed ban.

We have also met with a broad range of stakeholders: environmental groups, health organizations, municipal organizations, the agricultural, golf, turf, retail, manufacturing and production sectors.

Other jurisdictions across Canada have also begun to take action on this file. The province of Quebec, for example, has implemented a prohibition on the sale of pesticide fertilizer mixes and other pesticides that have a domestic use by the general public.

Prince Edward Island has placed restrictions on the sale of high-risk pesticides and is currently reviewing the implementation and potential impact of a province-wide ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides on lawns.

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador has banned the sale and the use of pesticide-fertilizer combinations already.

Many American states have also placed bans or restrictions on the use of lawn care pesticides on or near things such as child care facilities, schools, daycare centres, playing fields and sports fields.

We may not be the first to implement prohibitions on these products, but it's the intent of this legislation that we go the furthest.

We've heard Minister Gerretsen speak about the sectors that would be exempted. They include the golf industry, agriculture and forestry.

I'd like to take a moment to address the use of pesticides in the forestry and agricultural industries. In forestry, the use of pesticides is not simply to improve the appearance or the aesthetics of trees, so it's not cosmetic. Instead, what it does is help ensure the productivity of our forestry industry and the management of pests, which could threaten it. I'm sure my colleagues in this House are all aware of the devastation occurring in British Columbia right now from the influx of the mountain pine beetle.

Healthy growing forests are not only important to ensure we have a strong, vital forestry sector for years to come; they have a key role to play in helping mitigate global warming and the effects of climate change.

Just as in the agricultural sector and in the golf industry, those forestry workers who use pesticides are required to meet stringent rules on the use, handling, storage and application of pesticides. Our proposed approach allows for additional regulatory requirements to be placed on any person who is using pesticides under the forestry exemption. If Bill 64 is passed, the public will then be consulted with respect to the development of a regulation which would establish the uses related to forestry that are exempted from the proposed ban.

The aim of the proposed ban is to help ensure protection of the public interest, taking reasonable and prudent measures to reduce potential risk from the unnecessary use of those pesticides. The unnecessary uses of pesticides provide no intrinsic or countervailing benefit to rationalize their use in today's society. However, the use of pesticides to protect and enhance the reliability of commercial food production does have important benefits to our society.

I also want to recognize the important role that Ontario's farmers play in adopting integrated pest management, or IPM, approaches to reducing their own use of pesticides. Pesticide use surveys conducted every five years by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs have revealed that there is currently a 52% reduction in pesticide use on agricultural crops since 1983. Even more importantly, the reduction in the environmental risk of agricultural pesticides is greater than that because we shifted to much lower risk pesticides in that period of time.

Many factors have contributed to the reduction in agricultural pesticide use and risk in Ontario. These include increasing grower awareness and the introduction of newer pesticides with less risk being used at lower application rates. Other factors include improving the method of pesticide application and increasing the use of integrated pest management programs to reduce reliance on pesticides.

We know that further technological improvements and increased knowledge of pest populations will continue to reduce the risk associated with, and the need for, pesticides. We also recognize that education and outreach to Ontarians needs to be part of our plan to help people use greener approaches when it comes to lawn and garden care. The focus of all our efforts will be to inform people about how they can use good plant health care practices in maintaining their own gardens and minimizing pest problems, and what to do if pests actually do appear.

Simply using proper mowing, mulching, aeration, watering, fertilization and seeding techniques will all help to discourage weeds in lawns. Also, replacing traditional expanses of lawn with pest- and drought-resistant vegetation will also help get Ontario's neighbourhoods off their pesticide dependence. We plan to work with our key stakeholders to deliver a comprehensive education and outreach program on alternative methods.

We're seeing tremendous growth in greener products, and that, in turn, is going to help us bring and develop much more sustainable products, leading to a much stronger economy. The proposed legislation is also going to help support the development and sale of green alternatives that are better for the environment and for Ontario's families. In our recent budget, our government has

allocated more than $10 million over four years that is going to support our plan to ban the use of cosmetic pesticides and foster the development and sale of alternative green and ecologically healthier products.

I'm very proud to note that my own hometown of Oakville has recently passed a bylaw prohibiting the use of cosmetic pesticides. Around 33 other Ontario municipalities have had the courage to do the same thing. I want to congratulate these forward-thinking jurisdictions for taking these important steps to protect the health of their own communities. I also want to note the great work municipal staff are doing, learning about how to maintain our parks and sports fields without having to resort to pesticide use.

But while municipalities may pass bylaws on the use of cosmetic pesticides, they do not address the sale of these products. The goal of our province-wide ban is to set up a consistent program across the province that provides greater restrictions that include the sale of those products.

Our government's proposed ban will replace the many different bylaws that have been passed around the province. We need to give the same level of protection to all Ontarians, no matter where they live. We're at a very important crossroads for our environmental and health protection, both here in Ontario and around the world. We can no longer turn away from the fact that we are all responsible for the overall health of our environment. The steps we take daily, and the daily actions we perform, can have far-reaching effects for better or for worse.

Our health and the health of our planet are intrinsically linked. We see with greater clarity how all life is interconnected, and we must act to reduce potential risks; it's that simple. People everywhere, including in the province of Ontario, deserve to live in communities that support their health and their children's health. Ontarians need to know that when their children play outside, they are not being exposed to needless risk from cosmetic pesticides.

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For all the reasons I have spoken of and for the benefit of future generations, I am proud to stand in support of our government's proposed ban on the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides in Ontario. I would close by encouraging all members of the House to do the same and support this ban.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I want to mention to the member for Oakville, who spoke about the forest industry, that I would hope that during the consultation process, when they're looking at the forest industry, what they need to make sure of is that they contact the other sectors that are affected by the forestry industry as well. For those who don't know, when the forestry industry goes in and they spray for the chemicals—I am sure the members from Thunder Bay are very familiar with what takes place there—they come in, they spray and they kill all the foliage there. That allows for the growth of the single target species that they're trying to bring up in that area. The difficulty is that when they kill all that growth, a lot of times, that's food for other species, whether it's the woodcock or whether it's the moose. Predominantly, moose is what the Minister of Natural Resources would hear about, because the food source for those animals is gone when the spring comes. They need to address that because in the north it's quite an issue, particularly with a lot of moose hunters who participate. I'm sure the members from that part of the province will be very familiar with that.

I would make some other suggestions as well. Why not do some better training for weed inspectors? If weed inspectors know that there's close access to a stream, and the half-life of something like Roundup, for example, is 24 hours, they could recommend that certain chemicals be utilized or not utilized in specific areas, and the inspection by weed inspectors would certainly help ensure proper usage in a lot of other areas.

As well, last week I had some concerns—I have young kids at home; Josh and Garrett are 11 and 12 now, and it always drives me crazy—on no-spray days. Guess what? There should have been a no-spray day last week. I don't know if the members are familiar with that. Once the wind is up to a certain speed, they shouldn't be spraying. Sure enough, they were out spraying the chemicals on their lawns, and it didn't matter to them, because who is out enforcing it? If the weather channel came forward and said, "Hey, this is a no-spray day in this area," that would certainly get the message out so the public is informed, as well as those companies that aren't being watched and should be watched.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment today.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's a good opportunity to respond, to the minister in particular, on this matter because New Democrats welcome provincial action to ban the application of pesticides for aesthetic purposes.

I must admit I was a bit puzzled as to why there is no legislated pesticide reduction plan for golf courses. I worry about golfers. I've got to admit I don't play golf. I don't like the sport. I just think it contributes—

Mr. Mike Colle: What have you got against golf?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I really think it contributes to obesity, by the way; I really do.

I've got to admit, I tried it once. I swung that pole, and I just dropped the club and left it. I said, "What is this sport about?" I couldn't quite believe that people would spend hours and hours at this game. Not only that; they've got these little cars that they hop onto to go and fetch the ball. They don't even walk. They get out, they do this, and that's the extent of the physical work. I've got to tell you, it contributes to obesity. For that reason alone, we should get rid of golf.

I'm concerned about the fact that these people are on these golf courses—and I worry for you golfers, I really do, because you are into that grass, you're picking up the balls and whatever else you're doing and you are taking a whole lot of pesticides into your system. I'm worried

because it's going to affect your body in more ways than you can imagine.

The minister says, "We're going to deal with it at some point down the line." Why? Why are we delaying this? Why don't we allow municipalities, where they want, to be able to say, "We are going to deal with pesticides in the golf courses"? Why couldn't you give the municipality that power? You are preventing municipalities from doing that if they want, and you're preventing municipalities from worrying about these poor golfers who are going to imbibe so much of this pesticide that's going to kill them. I'm telling you, it's a problem.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: First of all, I appreciate the honourable member from Trinity–Spadina's sharing with us his golf trauma stories, but I just simply suggested that there is therapy, rehabilitation and remedial action that can be taken for all these various problems.

I think it's important for us to speak about Bill 64, the Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act. First of all, as a physician-legislator I can tell you that this is part of a larger domain or larger initiative about environmental poisons, stealth estrogens or stealth carcinogens that unfortunately are more and more common.

As you will appreciate, there was quite a wave in the press recently about the carcinogenic potential of things found in plastic, specifically bisphenol A. There are stealth estrogens and stealth other kinds of chemicals which are secretly invading our livable world and our livable space. So I think it's important that we move on initiatives like this.

For example, on Saturday this past weekend we, at our own home, had the opportunity of having a lovely little birthday party for our daughter and son: Shamsa, nine, and Shafiq junior, seven. Not that my lawn is clean of weeds—we much more believe in survival of the fittest. But having said that, had we ever decided to use cosmetic pesticides, I think we probably would have, unknowingly, and perhaps with the best of intentions, exposed the 30 or 40 kids who were at this party to these potential hazards.

I think the other thing is that part of the principle of medicine is that microscopic or minimal exposures repeated over time—over years and years, a decade or so, 20 years—are actually part of the real difficulty and challenge in medicine and disease prevention. That's why I support this ban wholeheartedly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Dufferin–Caledon. Actually, it is Dufferin–Caledon that I would like to reference when talking about the pesticide-ban-proposed legislation because Caledon in fact has a pesticide bylaw in effect currently.

I would hope that part of the consultation that will occur as we move forward discussing Bill 64 will be to review and ask for input from the municipalities to ensure that the coordination does occur.

There's one interesting thing that I noticed neither the minister nor the PA referenced, and that was the news last week where the Premier didn't seem to be very up to date on Bill 64. In the Timmins Daily Press, the headline is, "Premier Admits He 'Screwed Up' on Pesticide Ban."

On Earth Day, of course, the big announcement was the proposed legislation, first reading. Then, as the press asked him questions: "Municipalities will be forbidden from enacting tougher bylaws than the provincial standard once the new ban takes effect in 2009," which, of course, is not at all what the Premier said on Earth Day.

So for a piece of legislation that is supposedly critical and important to the Liberals' second mandate, I question just how much thought and discussion took place at the caucus and cabinet table surrounding the pesticide ban. Of course, the Premier corrected himself and said that, no, in fact municipalities will not be able to have a tougher ban, which is one of the reasons we need to have that discussion happen at the committee level.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Oakville, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise again and to wrap up a little bit. I'm quite surprised at the member of Trinity–Spadina in his opposition to golf. It was alarming. I come from a riding where golf is very important. Glen Abbey, as you know, was the home of the Canadian Open for some time. Certainly, when you think of some of the major sports figures in Canadian history, you think of people like George Knudson, Mike Weir and Sandra Post. These people have all put our country on the map. I wouldn't describe any one of them as obese people. I think it actually has become a recreational pursuit of a great many Canadians and North Americans, and it's something that is a part of the toxins reduction strategy.

We've tried to bring in a piece of balanced legislation that I think is designed to address some of those places where we can reduce the unnecessary risk and some of those places where we're going to use the tool of increased regulation and IPM certification, a variety of means by which we can control the use in other places such as in the forestry sector, such as in agricultural circumstances and when it comes to the exemption for golf courses. So it provides an exemption for golf courses, but it also enables the government to bring in regulations and conditions and establish additional requirements for the golf sector so that they would have to meet a much higher standard than they do today. I think that's what this whole bill is about. It's improving the standard of health in the province of Ontario for all Ontarians.

1440

We've taken a look at this issue. We've listened to stakeholders from around the province, to those who are engaged in the industry who want a level playing field for all people who are engaged in the lawn care industry, to the producers, manufacturers and the health care professionals who have been warning us for some time that some action is necessary.

I believe this shows a lot of courage in being the first government to come forward with a proposed ban on the

cosmetic use of pesticides. Its time is long overdue and it deserves the support of all members of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As we all know, we're here today to debate Bill 64. It was introduced on April 22, and the long title is, An Act to amend the Pesticides Act and to prohibit the use and sale of pesticides that may be used for cosmetic purposes.

I will say right off the top that while myself and many of my colleagues support the concept of eliminating the non-essential use of pesticides to protect our health and environment in this province, having looked at the legislation, I do have a number of concerns. I do fear that in their overzealous behaviour and fervour to jump on a hot topic—and this is after a year, going on five years, of no significant government legislation—this regime is trotting out what essentially seems to be a ban-now-and-ask-questions-later approach. It's become a trademark approach of this present McGuinty government, a government of nanny-state politics, a government that essentially seems to be here to tell the people in Ontario, "Do this and don't do that."

In this particular bill, Bill 64, we do see a government that chooses to wear blinders and to shut out other approaches, a government, in my view, that perhaps could be accused of using a cannon to squash a fly, a government that seems to be actively working to ensure that science doesn't get in the way of a good story. This is a very complex issue, and it must be based on science, and we—when I say "we", I do refer to this government—must do due diligence.

As it stands, the bill is suggesting that there's something inherently wrong with these products. Health Canada and other internationally known research organizations disagree with that. They disagree with the concept, as suggested by this government, that there is something wrong with the various herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and algaecides that are used to control pests in our environment.

Another concern is that this bill essentially creates a double standard for the health of urban dwellers versus rural dwellers, or neighbours, or workers on golf courses, workers in the forest industry and farm workers. This bill also has the possibility to create a slippery slope for forestry and for agriculture. It undermines and can undermine the public's confidence in those practices used in forestry and those practices used in farming. I'm concerned that this government's knee-jerk reaction, to simply ban anything it doesn't like or doesn't understand, may in the end come back to bite, in many ways that the present government simply has not thought through.

That being said, I do believe that Bill 64, also known as the Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act, can be useful. It can be useful, at minimum, as a starting point to initiate debate in hopes that changing the draft legislation we see before us today, in order that research-based evidence, good science, pure research, and not emotion, not narrow-minded ideology, can pave the way for better legislation that would better protect us and our environment.

To that end, I'll start by outlining some of the facts that surround this issue and this legislation so that we're all cognizant of the direction in which we're heading here. I'll begin by examining exactly what this government is looking to control. I do raise the question: "What are pesticides?" We have heard a number of speeches on this subject, fairly general presentations, with nothing very specific.

I think we all have a bit of an idea of what pest control products are, but I'll go through this for the record. "Pesticide" is a very broad term defining products to control insects—for example, weeds, diseases, fungi, algae and rodents—and things that are commonly thought of as pests—hence the name pesticides—on not only plants and fruit, vegetables, pests we find on animals and on our lawns.

We should go beyond just this blanket term of "pesticide," especially when you start linking certain diseases to pesticides. It's very important to identify the disease you're talking about in human beings and very important to identify the particular herbicide, insecticide or fungicide that you are linking to that disease. As yet, we have not heard any of these links. We hear references, in very general terms, of a link between disease and the use of these products.

Pesticides, to break them down a little more broadly, obviously include insecticides, herbicides or plant killers, fungicides, sanitizers, growth regulators, rodenticides, soil fumigants, pool chemicals and algaecides.

This present Minister of the Environment introduced the Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act on April 22, as we know. It contains provisions that would not only ban the use but would also ban the sale of certain prescribed pesticides in this province. It also contains proposed regulation-making authority for the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations prescribing pesticides, to which the use and sale bans contained within the bill would apply. Accordingly, if the legislation passes, regulation may be made prescribing such pesticides.

The Ministry of the Environment prepared lists of pesticides—again, I would assume, for discussion and not necessarily decisions made at this point—on which active ingredients on that list would be banned for use or which active ingredients would be banned for sale. We have much to debate here.

But some of the products that could fall in that category—2,4-D, for example. We've been using 2,4-D for decades. It's sold as a lawn care product. It's an herbicide. Sometimes it's used in weed and feed products. That's a particular combination that in many cases probably doesn't make much sense. I think by the time we finish this debate we can better determine the policy direction with respect to these weed and feed products.

Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Roundup. I was using Roundup this weekend out of necessity, not for cosmetic reasons. Roundup is an herbicide. It kills all plants. It kills the annuals, perennials and brush. It's used if you have a very serious weed problem. Perhaps you've

been running continuous corn and you wish to switch over to, say, an alfalfa and grass mixture, and you pretty well need a fresh start. Roundup, I have found, is very useful with respect to homeowner use as well, when you have one heck of a problem with weeds that perhaps you cannot get at with a lawnmower.

1450

Malathion is another fairly common name. It's found in aerosols, aerial sprays, foggers, baits, pet collars and animal dips to kill insects; it's an insecticide. Carbaryl, better known as Sevin, is also an insecticide. Diazinon is sold under the trade names Spectracide and KnoxOut, again to kill insects. Captan is a fungicide, a totally different kind of product altogether.

Over the years, many of these pest control products have been used to protect people in Ontario from, for example, mosquitoes, noxious weeds and allergenic weeds. I think of burdock—I've had an ongoing battle with burdock for as long as I can remember—stinging nettles, not to be confused with the Scotch thistle or burdock, and poison ivy, another seed product. I call them pitchforks.

If you're hunting in the fall and you're wearing wool socks, there's a good chance—certainly on our farms on the edge of our bush—that you're going to bring back pitchforks. They're tough to get out—tough to get out of the hair on your dog as well. Couch grass is a tough one. It's something you don't want on your lawn or in your fields if you're going to be putting in clover or alfalfa.

Many products have been developed over the years, and duly tested, analyzed and checked for use, whether it's on rose bushes and other vegetation, to treat trees that have become diseased—I think of gypsy moths, for example—or used if your land or a particular spot for a garden has become overrun with weeds.

Further questions: I don't know whether many of these have been answered so far today. The government had another 20 minutes to speak to this bill. I don't know why they cut it short on this one.

We had some very useful information come in January of this year—I think it was January 15, 2008. A coalition of environmental groups and health professionals called on the present McGuinty government to quickly implement the province-wide ban; this was a promise in the last provincial election. I think we heard today that this group was composed of the Canadian Cancer Society, the David Suzuki Foundation, Environmental Defence, Pesticide Free Ontario and the Ontario Medical Association. We now have proposed legislation with a number of categories, a number of ideas to put forward; for example, the preamble to Bill 64: "The bill amends the Pesticides Act to prohibit the use and sale of certain pesticides that may be used for cosmetic purposes," as we know.

As we can read, Bill 64 would have this government ban the cosmetic use of pesticides or, as the short title reads, have a cosmetic pesticides ban. There's a bit of wordplay here. It may refer to cosmetic pesticides; it may refer to a cosmetic ban. There are two different approaches. Are we talking about banning the use or banning the product, and how far will this government take it?

I think most of us here would agree that eliminating the non-essential use of pesticides is important, certainly for protecting our environment. Other things are important as well, beyond just a legislative ban, which is pretty quick and dirty—a short way of doing it. Education and information are very important in dealing with these products. Training, as we see with respect to forest workers and farmers, is very, very important—I did not see that mentioned in the short three-page bill that's been crafted by this government—education and training of consumers about how to have healthy lawns, how to have healthy gardens without the use, overuse or the inappropriate use of some of these pest control products that I have been talking about so far.

This term "cosmetic use" is open to interpretation and can cause some concern. Just what does cosmetic use mean? It may imply that pesticides associated with lawn or garden care serve only an aesthetic purpose. However, products can be used for cosmetic purposes that also have very legitimate essential uses. The same products that control dandelions, for example—I do not have a problem with dandelions. I've always had dandelions on my lawns. I have dandelions on my lawn today. I don't use these products on my lawns. I don't use fertilizer. I feel very strongly—why would I want to encourage my lawn to grow? Then you end up mowing it perhaps more regularly than you would want to. But the very same products that control dandelions are also used to control ragweed, poison ivy and thistles, for example.

By the same token, I wonder: Is this government, with this narrow, rifle-shot approach, turning a blind eye to the use of lawn mowers for the cosmetic grooming of lawns? In some lawn mowers, the smaller mowers and push mowers, you add oil to the gasoline, something that is probably not a good thing to do. I don't know whether this government has done any kind of a risk-benefit analysis, let alone a cost-benefit analysis. We ban certain products. Will this require more mechanical control of weeds on a person's property? Will this result in people burning more gasoline and burning more oil within that gasoline in lawn mowers to control weeds? What kind of impact will that have on air quality in Ontario?

We should look a little further, and if we do look further into the justification for this proposed legislation, we also find that there are differences here. There are different regulations proposed for urban as opposed to rural residents and rural children. There are exemptions, as we know, for agriculture and golf courses. But what we don't find in this proposed legislation anywhere are the scientific criteria to support environmental and health concerns that are being suggested here. We don't find a value analysis. We don't find a benefit analysis, let alone a cost-benefit analysis, as I mentioned. There is no risk-benefit analysis available. I trust there will be, now that we have duly commenced debate on this particular piece of legislation.

As I mentioned, this bill is only three pages long. In fact, it's not really a new piece of legislation; it's merely a set of amendments to the existing Pesticides Act.

The bottom line: In many ways, what we have here is a denial of the right of Ontario to use pest control products that both the federal and provincial governments have already determined to be safe to use according to the label instructions. So we have a bill that will ban something that has been deemed to be safe to use.

1500

We should also clarify that this proposed law will supersede municipal legislation—and that was awfully vague. We did get some conflicting advice from the Premier on that one. Many will remember that there seemed to be a question mark as to whether this provincial legislation was going to override municipal bylaws or not, in spite of what we were told when it was announced on Earth Day. We were led to believe that this piece of legislation would rule, and then the Premier stepped in, and he used the term "screwed up" when he said municipalities could have tougher anti-pesticide rules than the province. I know this would be disappointing for some within the environmental movement. That's the way it goes with this particular government.

While he was unveiling this pesticide ban—I think it was three or four weeks ago—the Premier said that municipalities would be able to introduce tougher rules if they wanted to. So that was out there and duly reported in the media. He now says he was wrong. The environment minister, who was standing next to him at the time of this announcement, apparently was—to quote the papers; I guess this would be the Premier speaking—"unduly deferential" when he remained silent about the error put forward by the Premier. I understand the Premier says he has instructed Minister Gerretsen to correct him right away if he ever makes that mistake again in public.

As I said earlier, it is incumbent on this provincial government to do due diligence and ensure that it has the proper scientific data before we move forward on this legislation.

I mentioned earlier, at the beginning of my remarks, that there's little in the way of scientific criteria to support the health concern. Certainly this government and the anti-pesticide groups have trumpeted the literature review of the Ontario College of Family Physicians, OCFP, as proof of the links between pesticide use and cancer, as well as the links between pesticide use and learning disabilities and the links between pesticide use and birth defects. However, based on reports from a number of national health agencies, upon further review, this report is being questioned from many, many sides. As I said, and I'm quite open about this, I'm not a scientist—I did work for a research organization for 20 years; I do have an M.Sc.—but I wish to quote, in part, a number of papers that have been put forward by people who are scientists. I think it's important to report some of the following.

Health Canada, for example, sets the standard for our country; Health Canada sets a standard internationally. Health Canada, upon reviewing this summary that was provided by the Ontario College of Family Physicians—referred to in this House by Environment Minister Gerretsen on April 22—determined, "The report did not consider all or even most of the relevant epidemiological evidence, which has led to many questions in interpretation."

Further, the report of the UK's Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution stated, "The treatment of review papers is unclear and appears inconsistent.... The review seems to over-interpret the findings."

It goes on to say, "Strong conclusions are drawn from evidence of rather weak quality."

This is another report from the UK Advisory Committee on Pesticides, and again, this is referring to the Ontario College of Family Physicians of Canada review that this present government is now hanging its hat on. I quote: "Discrepancies arise from serious flaws in the methods employed in the review."

Again referring to the literature review of the Ontario College of Family Physicians, I quote further, "the failure ... to take account of all or even most of the relevant epidemiological evidence, and the biases inherent in the way ... material was picked out for inclusion." They go on to say that the "committee ... concluded that the report did not raise any new concerns about pesticide safety that were not already being addressed, and does not indicate" the "need for additional regulatory action," as we see presented before us today by the McGuinty government.

I'd like to quote a statement from Cantox Health Sciences International: "The conclusions drawn by the Ontario College of Family Physicians report are biased.... The conclusions drawn by the OCFP report paint a very distorted picture of the likelihood of pesticide-related health risks in Canada."

Even the Ontario College of Family Physicians themselves admitted that, when confronted with criticisms on their report, and again I will quote the Ontario college, "diagnostic approaches were not the focus of the report." They further offer that "we can always demand better reviews and better evidence, but we should ask ourselves whether this is the best way to move policy."

I'm not a scientist, but the people who published these reviews of that review are scientists, the ones who made these statements. As far as the validity of the family physicians' report is concerned, I think we can see that the jury is out. However, when this law was introduced, the Minister of the Environment did hang his hat on this literature review of the Ontario College of Family Physicians. I would hope that MPPs in this Legislature would continue to debate this evidence and the scientific, or lack of scientific, underpinnings of this particular piece of proposed legislation.

There are concerns with another report that in the past has been held up as evidence of pesticide-borne health impacts to support municipal bylaws for the restriction of pest control use.

On July 11, 2007, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment wrote to urge the city of

Kingston to pass a strong pesticide bylaw, again at that time citing "many studies but [drawing] your attention to research published in April 2006 by the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS), Canada's most distinguished authority on children's health. The CPS examined the most common lawn herbicide in Canada, 2,4-D, and concluded that 2,4-D can be persuasively linked to cancers, neurological impairment and reproductive problems."

What is disturbing is that when pressed on this information with respect to the validity of this Canadian Paediatric Society report, Elizabeth Moreau, director of communications and public education for the society, had this to say: "The study referred to was published in Paediatrics and Child Health, which is the journal of the Canadian Paediatric Society, by authors who have no affiliation with CPS. It was not written by the Canadian Paediatric Society, and does not reflect the opinion of the CPS. Currently, we do not have any position statements on pesticide use." I do want to ensure that that was read into the record. Further, "the CPS should not be cited" in "this information. This has been communicated to the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment."

1510

It seems there is some misrepresentation of the facts going on here, which has led to a situation. It has led the firm MREP Communications, a consulting service, to launch a lawsuit on this very issue. This is with respect to the Kingston bylaw, the hometown of our environment minister.

Here is an excerpt from the press release of that lawsuit: "In reviewing the presenters of medical evidence to municipalities, we discovered that the majority of statements or claims made could not be verified."

Mr. Phil McNeely: Tell that to the children's hospital doctors.

Mr. Toby Barrett: You might be involved in this lawsuit, if you wish. Perhaps, step outside and address that.

"The individuals were either not qualified or claimed to have qualifications [that were] not verifiable through medical organizations" or facilities.

Recently, my local paper, the Simcoe Reformer, to their credit, has been hosting this debate through their pages. I write newspaper columns there. It has generated a number of letters on both sides of this issue, and I truly hope that the members opposite are looking at both sides.

In response to a letter to the editor from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, as I've mentioned, we read that the US Environmental Protection Agency, the EPA, "determined that the existing data do not support a conclusion that links human cancer to 2,4-D exposure."

Industry Task Force II went on to say—this is in my local newspaper; this would have been a day or so later: "This rigorous scientific assessment over many years by the EPA concurs with other regulatory agencies tasked with protecting human health, including: Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency"—the PMRA—"the European Commission and the World Health Organization."

I also point out that the 2005 review of the safety of 2,4-D conducted by Health Canada, conducted by PMRA, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, found that "the use of 2,4-D and its end-use products to treat lawns and turf does not entail an unacceptable risk of harm to human health or the environment." That's from our own Health Canada. I know this would be disappointing for the members opposite because it's an opinion that flies in the face of what this government is trying to take responsibility for.

When we look closer at the science, while proponents of pesticide bans imply that routine exposures to low level of pesticides are harmful, evidence does not back that up. In Fraser Institute's 2003 publication Misconceptions About the Causes of Cancer, toxicologists Lois Gold and Bruce Ames point out that synthetic chemicals—such as pesticides, for example—are no more toxic than natural chemicals made by the plants we consume every day.

In their paper, Gold et al used data from rodent tests—mice experiments, I suppose; rat experiments; maybe rabbits, I'm not sure—to rank the cancer hazard of synthetic and natural pesticides. It's indicated from that data that pesticide exposure does not pose a significant risk when compared to many other chemicals, both natural and synthetic, that we encounter every day. The Gold and Ames data suggest that a single sleeping pill poses a cancer risk, as they indicate, 150 million times higher than routine exposure to residue from pesticides.

A 1997 report of the National Cancer Institute of Canada observes, "The panel has concluded that the exposure of the general population to pesticide residue is minimal and below those levels already deemed safe by government regulatory agencies." This is the National Cancer Institute of Canada. I haven't heard that organization mentioned yet in debate. The same report explains, "The panel did not find any existing evidence to suggest that crop protection chemicals and lawn and garden products are likely to be a major cause of cancer." However, in contrast—and this is why I really would hope that this government is taking due diligence in taking a look at the myriad of research papers and evidence that's out there—the Canadian Cancer Society states: "Exposure to chemical pesticides has been linked to childhood brain cancer, childhood and adult leukemia, some types of kidney cancer, neuroblastoma, breast cancer, lung cancer and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma." This was reported in the Thunder Bay Chronicle in January of this year.

There we have it: some conflicting evidence. I regret that this bill does not appear to be based on anything close to consensus of any examination of neutral, objective research, evidence or science.

I'd like to talk about exemptions. When we look at this proposed legislation, we see it includes an exemption for farm use. That's an exemption that I am wholeheartedly in favour of. Again, given that this is a majority government, they will pass this ban no matter what, but I

see a delineation between cosmetic and curative or public health; I make a distinction. More to the point, when farmers use these products, when the forest industry uses these products, it's either to protect the crop or to create an environment where a new crop or new trees can come along. Obviously they're not using these products to make their crop look a little better cosmetically, although I do know, having been involved in farming all of my life so far, we do put a great deal of weight on just exactly what that field of corn looks like or what those soybeans look like. If you have weeds, you're probably concerned about what your neighbours are going to think, so maybe there is a cosmetic factor in there somewhere.

Essentially, as we know, it's done to ensure the viability of farmers to put food and nutrition on the table for everybody else who lives in the province and elsewhere, given exports. We know that golf courses are exempt even though they use products to make golf turfs cosmetically more attractive. So there are exemptions.

My concern is that exemptions in this bill set a double standard. Scotts Canada put forward a submission to the Environmental Bill of Rights:

"A ban focusing on towns and cities while ignoring rural areas would be seriously flawed. To introduce a ban on the use of Health-Canada-approved pest control products in urban centres while permitting their use in rural settings establishes two standards of health and safety for Ontario residents. Clearly where our health and the health of our environment is concerned, a double standard is neither desirable nor acceptable."

1520

This exemption does lead to questions like, would an organization like Pesticide Free Ontario—like many here, I have had a meeting with Pesticide Free Ontario—be happy with any exemptions that belie their ultimate goal, as reflected in their name, of a pesticide-free Ontario? That is their goal. Is this the eventual goal of this government? We don't know. Is there a slippery slope?

Two weeks before the last election, Premier McGuinty was on The Bill Carroll Show on CFRB. On that show he's reported to have said, when asked about the pesticide legislation, that this is the first step. I guess there's more to come. I do ask, when will the other shoe drop?

Questions: If this government considers a substance dangerous for one to come in contact with in their urban neighbourhood environment, are rural inhabitants not exposing themselves to the same risk? Why does this government not consider a substance as dangerous on food we ingest as it is suggested to be on our front lawns? If you can eat it and if rural residents are exposed, is this substance as dangerous as government would have us believe through this bill? Does this bill suggest that government will put rural children living next to a field treated with 2,4-D or Roundup—if this government is planning on banning Roundup, or glyphosate, the active ingredient—at a different risk than urban children, who would in the future be growing up adjacent to lawns not treated with 2,4-D?

Is there a suggested risk for residents in golf course communities? If it's okay for one group of the population to use a substance on food crops, why is it not similarly okay for our urban or rural small vegetable gardeners to use that substance? Does the substance somehow become more toxic in a small garden and should not be used, whereas it can be used in commercial fruit and vegetable production, for example?

This is one problem I have with Bill 54. It seems to be predicated on the belief, or the suggestion, that there's something inherently wrong with these products, something inherently unsafe with the herbicides, insecticides and other pesticides we're talking about. We know, and logic tells us, that the product does not become more or less safe or dangerous or toxic depending on where it is used. Therefore, it must be that farmers are allowed to use these products because they know how to use them properly and safely, again because of their training and accreditation. How do they know how to use this product properly? How do farmers know how to use pesticides safely? Because of requirements: Ontario farmers already have stringent rules for the storage and application of pesticides.

As we should know by now, farmers must be trained. Farmers must be certified under the grower pesticide safety course before they can even purchase, let alone use, pesticides. They require this training and recertification every five years. The results of these kinds of programs—very good programs—are clear. Through research, education and field delivery of IPM—integrated pest management; I'll talk about that a bit more if I have time—Ontario farmers have reduced their use of pesticides by more than 52%. I really think, when we wade through this legislation, that we can learn a great deal by the precedent set by farmers in this province. But, instead of learning from the success of training and certification in our farm fields, this government appears to have chosen to ignore this track record.

I've long spoken in this House about the legacy of the Ontario farmer as a true steward of the land, but I do feel that others—for example, homeowners—can also benefit from information. Homeowners can benefit from education, from training, perhaps even a program of certification.

I do remain confident that even those in this government can see their way past their blinders and comprehend some of the benefits of training and education, as opposed to a short-sighted blanket ban or a focus on negative sanctions.

We've heard little discussion yet of enforcement. I don't know how you enforce something like this. I don't have the information available. I don't know what the fines are if somebody is caught with a jug of 2,4-D or a jug of Roundup.

Golf courses are exempt, but as Kim Novak, the editor of our Simcoe Reformer, wrote in an editorial, "How long will it be before a golf course worker somewhere challenges the law, saying they are being exposed to

what the government has deemed to be unhealthy material?"

I ask, myself, when will the day come when a farm worker or a forest worker will walk off the job because they are being exposed to products that this legislation, by suggestion, deems to be inherently unsafe?

While we're talking about agriculture and pest control, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that there is an unease in our rural areas. While an exemption is currently proposed—and that's a good thing—there is concern that this bill may be the thin edge of the wedge, if you will, the slippery slope.

As Premier McGuinty said on The Bill Carroll Show, cosmetic use is a "first step." I find that worrisome, given this government's track record. I, and others, do feel—

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, that analogy of the camel that now has his head in the tent: Where are we going? Just think of that tent. Just think if someone put that tent up on a slope that was slippery. Perish the thought.

When I met with representatives of Pesticide Free Ontario, I asked about the agricultural exemption. I was very concerned. I was told that the current legislation is "just the start"—again, something that was articulated last year by Premier McGuinty.

Again, when you have the support of an organization like Pesticide Free Ontario—I just ask you to think this through. Just think of the name of that organization. Is it possible to grow winter wheat in the province of Ontario without herbicide? Is it possible to grow corn or soybeans?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: They can do it.

Mr. Toby Barrett: The Minister of Agriculture says they can do it, so that's a future projection.

Most of the proposed active ingredients to be banned include many ingredients that our farmers presently use on an ongoing basis. Perhaps they will not be using them 50 or 100 years in the future—I don't know. But I believe that some people would begin to question why these soon-to-be-banned products are used on the food that we eat if they are inherently dangerous, as suggested here. I do fear that it would not take long for this government to take that next step and to target agricultural producers.

1530

So the bill does seem to imply that there's something inherently wrong with these products—products that we use to produce our food, products we use to produce our food and manage our forests.

I don't feel I am alone in my concern. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture and CropLife Canada have been running ads in the Ontario Farmer. That's a weekly farm newspaper that we get in Ontario. The ads are titled, "If you think this issue doesn't apply to agriculture, think again." The ad went on, and I quote:

"Ontario's proposed ban on lawn and garden pesticides is moving forward, and could have a significant impact on farmers. All pesticides undergo the same rigid health and safety standards. With Health Canada's review in place and by following label directions, pesticides can be used safely in agriculture, on fairways and greens, lawns and gardens, in forestry or in public health settings.

"Banning pesticide use in urban settings while maintaining they are safe for use in agriculture undermines the public's confidence in farming"—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: That is so ridiculous.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm quoting the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I'm a member. I'm not going against my own organization. I'd better repeat that. I was interrupted.

This is from the OFA, the largest farm organization in the province: "Undermines the public's confidence in farming, the safety of our food supply and Health Canada's regulatory safeguards."

At the bottom of the ad, the OFA—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: That's fearmongering.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I know the Minister of Agriculture accuses the Ontario Federation of Agriculture of fearmongering.

The OFA encourages readers to write to their local MPP to "be sure that they understand that a ban is not the answer—responsible, safe use is."

That, to my mind, really sums it up. I repeat: The ban—

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have to repeat this. I'm being interrupted.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'll just repeat the statement from the Ontario of Federation of Agriculture ad: "a ban is not the answer—responsible, safe use is." Where did farmers learn responsible, safe use? From information, from education, from a training program and an accreditation program.

Unfortunately, the bill we see before us today prevents the government of Ontario from sending a strong signal that all unnecessary use should be avoided and that only the safest use will be permitted, when necessary. That's how we do it in farming. Whether used on golf courses—not only farms and forests—on farms to protect food supply or to preserve our home landscapes, Health-Canada-approved pest control products can and should be used safely only when necessary, and all unnecessary use should be avoided. And that's the position I take. Again, this bill, as it is currently constructed, prevents the government from sending this direct message.

There is a concern that eliminating pesticides would make fruit and vegetable production more difficult and more expensive. I think of home gardens, urban gardens. It's certainly more difficult to grow in a home garden or a small orchard in town. Therefore, essentially, you could see in a population less consumption of fruit and vegetables and increasing risk of disease. I make the assumption that apples and vegetables are good for you.

With respect to commercial agriculture, there's a research analysis that's entitled, Benefits of Crop Protec-

tion Technologies on Canadian Food Production, Nutrition, Economy and the Environment. They found that without the use of pesticides—something our Minister of Agriculture was just musing on—crop yields would drop by 30% to 50%—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I was not musing that we wouldn't use them. We are guaranteeing their continued use.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order. The minister will come to order, please.

Mr. Toby Barrett: —largely because of loss to insects and pests, and retail food prices would jump by at least 27%.

I'll quote Greenpeace founder, Dr. Patrick Moore—I do point out that he's no longer with Greenpeace—a fairly controversial individual from beginning to end: "Eliminating synthetic pesticides would mean giving up the huge productivity gains we have made in agriculture. It would mean turning wilderness and parkland to farmland and reducing biodiversity, at tremendous environmental cost and with no real benefit."

I should also mention that this McGuinty government appears to have no problem with using these chemicals indoors—passing strange, in my view—say, on common houseplants or to kill ants. Again, as we delve into this—and I hope this comes out in debate—we are seeing the weaving of a tangled web. You can spray for spiders inside but you can't outside. You can spray for ants inside your home, but under this legislation, looking at that list of active ingredients that are under debate, you won't be able to spray for ants outside on your front steps.

So, with regard to responsible, safe use, I feel this debate must continue. We must include lessons learned from IPM, integrated pest management.

I'd like to refer to the Scotts submission to the Environmental Bill of Rights registry—and they have just opened up a processing and distribution facility in my riding, in Delhi. "While it is true that in a few isolated situations, pest elimination can be achieved without the use of pesticides, most pest management programs around the home and in parks and natural areas rely on a combination of non-chemical and chemical control methods. Non-chemical pest management alternatives lessen the need to use pesticides, but they cannot completely eliminate it."

Scotts advocates preventive measures, such as planting the right plant in the right place, the timing of planting, sanitation efforts, over-seeding where necessary, feeding, aerating, and hand weeding where possible—and I have spent, many, many hours and many summers, full-time, pulling weeds. However, these measures do not offer permanent solutions in all cases, and I can attest to that—days and days on end. One of my jobs, 9 to 5, was pulling weeds in strawberries. That was before the use of weed-control herbicides. I personally do not think we're going to find people who would do that kind of work, even through our offshore program.

Integrated pest management, IPM, is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of common sense practices. IPM relies on comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests—the life cycle of insects, for example—and relies on that information, that body of knowledge, with respect to their interaction with the environment. For example, you do not spray gypsy moth control when larvae of another beneficial moth or lepidopteran—another butterfly species, for example—is moving up into the canopy. You pick the time and you pick the place.

I see my hour is drawing to a close, unless I could be given more time to speak. I don't know whether I could get permission to do that.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Not a chance.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Not a chance.

I appreciate using my full hour. I do know that the members opposite didn't use one third of their time. I hope they're not planning on crashing debate and scurrying off and doing something else on this one.

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I regret that the bill before us today seems to ignore the lessons we could learn from an integrated pest management approach, which would achieve the desired reduction in pesticide use while avoiding this heavy-handed, knee-jerk Liberal reaction that is inherent in an all-out ban on pesticides.

We heard mention of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. This government was successful in reducing the amount of regulated tobacco purchased, but take a look at the incredible increase in illegal tobacco. I think something like 37% of the cigarettes smoked now are illegal.

Sometimes prohibition doesn't work. Sometimes the road to hell is paved with good intentions. We have seen mistakes made in the past by this government, and I would hope quite sincerely that due diligence would be the order of the day with respect to this regime.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: As usual, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk gives a well-thought-out speech. Whenever he speaks in this Legislature, he exhibits a vast knowledge of the farming community. Also, I want to point out that in previous speeches he has made, as well as today, he researches his topic, and he brings to the Legislature some real dichotomies with regard to this legislation.

I must say, as a former Minister of the Environment, that when you're bringing forward legislation, you should have with you the studies, reports, risk management studies and scientific evidence with regard to what you're going to propose and put down in legislation. Quite frankly, with regard to a number of environmental policies this government has set out on, they haven't done that. When we had the deposit return on wine bottles and liquor bottles, we in this Legislature never received, and the public never received, any kind of analysis of the economic and environmental impact of that particular policy. When you do that, you make mistakes that cost dearly. We went through that mistake

in terms of using corn for the production of ethanol in this province. We have seen governments—our government was part of it—give money to entrepreneurs to build those facilities.

All I'm saying is that when you strike out with a policy like this, the scientific studies you have behind you should be tabled in the Legislature so that people can read them and we can in fact justify what we are doing in the Legislature.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I want to thank the previous speakers for their comments, but I think it's important that we don't lose sight of the original intent of this proposed ban. The original intent was to improve the health and safety, in our own communities, of this generation and of generations to come. That's what this is about. It's about an approach to community health that I think is often referred to as prudent avoidance; that is, you take a look at those things you think you can avoid, and one thing that I think would be at the top of everybody's list is the cosmetic use of pesticides. It's not an essential use. It's something we do to make something look more aesthetically pleasing, but it's not something we absolutely have to have. It's something we're currently introducing in our own homes and neighbourhoods that we can live without.

I have far more faith in the agricultural sector than some of the remarks I heard from the previous speaker. Use of pesticides, we agree, does have a countervailing benefit for the production of food. We don't intend to influence that at all. We understand there's a role in the agricultural community. We know that farmers are required to take pesticide safety training, we know they've got very strict rules about the storage of pesticides and we know that farmers in the agricultural community have been adopting IPM strategies on an ever-accelerating basis since at least 1983.

We're hoping that this is going to drive new green products in the economy. We know people still care about how their lawns look, we know people care about the health of their natural environment, but we know that their top priority is their own health and the health of their children.

This proposed bill asks you to take sides. Which side are you on? Are you on the side of the status quo or do you want to make your community safer? And if you want to make your community safer, you'll support the proposed ban.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's challenging to stay focused on what our environment critic said after you've heard some of the comments that came from across the floor. However, I will try to focus on the excellent speech made by our critic from Haldimand–Norfolk.

There is a double standard that the Liberals are setting up here, and the double standard is that we're not treating rural Ontarians the same way we're treating urban Ontarians. You are pitting golfers against soccer players, you are pitting forestry workers against factory workers, and yes, Minister, you are pitting agricultural residents against urban residents.

Interjection.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would be happy to. The reality is that this bill is setting up a huge amount of uncertainty in rural Ontario because the farmers and the agricultural producers are concerned. If the Minister of Agriculture wanted to actually show some leadership, what she should be doing right now is speaking up for rural Ontario and for the agricultural producers and saying, "Ontario-grown food and residents in rural Ontario are well served by the pesticide, herbicide and insecticide use and regulation that is in effect right now," instead of talking about, "Let's pit rural against urban."

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm happy to have an opportunity to offer some questions and comments and make some clarifications. That's very important. Number one, it's important to have this House understand that the Ontario college of family physicians and the Canadian Cancer Society have long been promoting a pesticide ban. There have been municipalities in the province of Ontario that have had pesticide bans in place for a number of years. What this legislation is looking to do is to provide some universality, some uniformity and some certainty, particularly in rural Ontario. The member from Dufferin–Caledon, had she read the bill, would know that.

With respect to rural Ontario, there is now certainty with Bill 64, because it very clearly provides exemptions for agriculture—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The minister makes reference to whether I read the bill or not. She doesn't have the ability to do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The bill is very clear. For anyone who had read it, they would have seen that agriculture is definitely exempted.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: So why is it exempt?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The reason why agriculture is exempted—and it was identified in the member from Haldimand–Norfolk's remarks—is that farmers are particularly trained in the application of pesticides. It is for that reason we feel very confident that when pesticides are used in farming activity, they will be appropriately applied.

I think it is important to clarify, however, that with respect to rural residential properties, the properties of the bill will apply. If you just have an acre piece of property in rural Ontario, the pesticide ban will apply there. It does not apply to agriculture activities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Haldimand–Norfolk, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the feedback. It is great to actually see a bit of debate generated on this legislation. There is some debate in the media. I encourage all members present to make sure you generate some letters to the editor. I don't want to see this rushed through. I don't want to see this a fait accompli.

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I do have some concerns. In the comments from the member for Oakville, he said, "Pick a side." Well, it's not about that. I use the principle of integrated pest management. I ask you to take a look at all sides. Take a look at the research evidence. Don't use this as a wedge issue. Granted, you ran on this issue in the past election. That would have accrued some votes your way.

But I do ask you quite sincerely to take a look at the evidence from Health Canada and from PMRA, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. Take a look at your own body, the Ontario Pesticides Advisory Committee. I'm concerned. I do not see any indication that you are receiving evidence from your own committee, the Ontario pest management advisory committee. That's a committee empowered by the Ontario government to—I think it's still chaired by Clay Switzer. He was the dean of Ontario Agricultural College when I was there. They are empowered to look at legislation like this. They are empowered to make amendments. Use your own committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure, as a member of the NDP, to speak today about this bill that will implement a ban on the sale and application of pesticides for aesthetic purposes. It's interesting to listen to this debate, to some extent. The Minister of the Environment is talking about the introduction of this bill as almost a new millennium in environmental protection. On the other side, the opposition is essentially talking about the devil's spawn. It's overblown on both sides.

We're talking about a measure that is a small step. I think Thomas Walkom, in his column in the Star, said that this would reduce pesticide use by about 4% in Ontario. Frankly, a 4% reduction is better than a 0% reduction, but again, it is neither as great a step as is represented by the government nor as drastic a step as is represented by the opposition.

The legislation, in fact, is long overdue. This government has had years to observe what municipalities have done, municipalities that have taken the lead; that have taken the hit in terms of having to work it through; that have had to deal with push back from industry, from those who are interested in the promotion of pesticides. Frankly, after the years of watching what municipalities have done—going to the Supreme Court—one would have expected a bill that was a bit more sophisticated and complete than the one that's been presented for our consideration.

I know that we're going to have an opportunity to get into those details when we get into committee. I know that environmental groups, health groups, agricultural groups and chemical industry groups will all be coming forward, presenting their view and their perspective. It's our hope that in the course of the committee process this bill is made stronger, that it's made more enforceable, that some of the issues that I will raise later will be dealt with, issues raised not only by the NDP, but also by organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society.

Let's look first at how we've arrived at this legislation. The municipalities really have been the true pioneers in moving this forward, which is why I have concerns later about the restriction on the power of municipalities in the future. The province has arrived very late to act on this. Those municipal leaders—those in Hudson, Quebec, and Toronto, Oakville and Markham—took big steps. They took greater political risks. They essentially made the political space available so that this step could be taken.

It was the city of Toronto and Hudson, Quebec, that fought for this sort of power all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. They're the ones who paid a substantial price to actually move this forward. Again, I want to reiterate, they are the people who deserve our support and our thanks for bringing things this far forward. The Toronto Environmental Alliance, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and a variety of environmental groups and health groups brought this legislation to this point.

In terms of the issue itself, the pesticides themselves, a little bit of background: Pesticides kill indiscriminately. It's their nature. They aren't targeted. You apply them and they cause biological damage. It's estimated that only about 5% of pesticides actually reach their target. So there's an awful lot of stuff that just sprays off, blasts off, and has impact on other organisms.

The World Health Organization estimates that 200,000 people are killed worldwide each year—that's up from 30,000 in 1990—and another three million people are poisoned annually by pesticides, many of them children. We're talking about serious substances. We're not talking about a minor problem; we're talking about a substantial health issue, a substantial risk-of-life issue. These are powerful products. They have to be treated with great care. I feel that eventually this whole generation of pesticides, insecticides will be swept away, but at the moment we're dealing with a powerful substance, still lethal.

A number of recent biomonitoring studies in the US found that when samples of children were tested, more than 90% had traces of certain insecticides or their breakdown products in their urine. These very low levels were not associated with health effects, but researchers caution that potential impacts may depend on the timing of such exposure in the young.

What's interesting to me is that we don't have ongoing biomonitoring. We don't have ongoing monitoring of the chemicals that are in our blood, in our bodies, in the blood and bodies of our children. Studies are done from time to time. We remark on what's there, but we don't have an ongoing surveillance in this society so that we know the overall chemical impact of the large quantity of pesticides, herbicides that we use.

There is strong evidence that children may be more vulnerable than other population groups to the impact of pesticides. A British study found that 50% of pesticide poisonings involved children under the age of 10. Several

studies have shown moderately increased risks of some cancers, such as leukemia, non-Hodgkin lymphoma and neuroblastoma, and some birth defects, with pesticide exposure around conception, in the womb and early infancy. In fact, it's that time when the human organism is starting to grow, starting to develop, that it's in its most rapid phase, when it is most susceptible to the impact of chemical messengers being introduced into the body and sending the wrong messages—messages that cause problems, errors and defects.

Pesticide residues spread by water and wind are being found everywhere, from inside polar bear fat to human breast milk. It's a problem of contamination that's global. It's not localized; it is a global problem.

So when it comes to pesticides and their use, it's entirely reasonable for us as a society to be cautious, to take steps to reduce our exposure. In this case, there's an opportunity—as has been pioneered by cities—to reduce exposure in situations where the outcome of the use of pesticides or herbicides is relatively minor, from the perspective of those who are keeping lawns or gardens. This is an aesthetic question. It is not a question of food; it is not a question of society as a whole running. I'm not saying that we shouldn't be addressing our use of pesticides in those spheres, but just to say again that this bill is very limited in its applications and very limited in its larger implications for society.

We need legislation that will reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides to uses where they're absolutely necessary, where they're used in a very targeted, focused way, and we need a renewed commitment by government to educate the public regarding the health and environmental implications of pesticide use. That means, as well, more money for independent research into the impact of pesticides on our health and the environment.

To suggest that the elimination of the aesthetic use of pesticides is the end of this process is not a reasonable assumption. In fact, you start with the uses that are of least consequence, and then you look for methods in every sphere to reduce, and hopefully ultimately eliminate, their use. So in this legislation, the health and environmental implications of pesticide application are clear: Banning the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides will minimize the risk associated with exposure to their constituent chemicals and will help educate about the health and environmental implications of pesticide use.

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We looked at this bill and sorted out the criteria by which we determined what we support and where we had problems, and I will be applying those. But I want to state what the objective of this bill is. It's an objective that will make selling pesticides proscribed under the act an offence punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. Pesticide applications for the purpose of agriculture and forestry and for promotion of public health and safety are exempt under the bill. So if you need pesticides to deal with West Nile virus or the increasing problem of bed bugs that we have here in Toronto, you could see why, on a public health basis, you might have to use a very powerful and risky tool.

But there are three main problems with this legislation, as written, which I and many others believe have to be dealt with in the course of this bill's going through committee and further debate.

First of all, this bill, as written, makes municipal bylaws inoperative. That strikes me as extraordinary. If it weren't for municipalities leading the way, we would not be here today. If Oakville, Peterborough, Toronto and Hudson, Quebec had not gone through the political storms, if they had not fought all the way to the Supreme Court, then there is no doubt in my mind—none whatsoever—that this bill would not be on the floor here. If we want action in the future, it's very important that we protect the ability of municipalities to move forward.

We would not have smoking laws in Ontario, laws to protect people from second-hand smoke, if municipalities had not taken the risks and hits they took to bring in laws to protect the public. They set the groundwork. I have to say that it's not just in Ontario and it's not just in Canada. In the United States, it was municipality by municipality bringing in bylaws that started to change the culture. That's an example we should consider. It may be that municipalities decide that pesticide use at golf courses is a problem, and they may want to take stronger action than is prescribed in this bill. Notwithstanding the comments of my colleague from Trinity–Spadina—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oh, you disagree with them?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My colleague, who stated his personal feelings about golf—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: He will heckle me. You can be sure that he will heckle me.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I've got two minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: He's got two minutes.

Notwithstanding his comments, there's no question that if municipalities wanted to have the power to pursue that matter, as this act is written, they could not do it. It's a good idea to have a province-wide standard; it's a bad idea to set aside the power of municipalities.

We've had a process in Ontario where the province has said, "We want to treat municipalities as equal partners," where they've been given more powers and told they are the masters of their fate, and now we're moving in and grabbing those powers back. It doesn't make sense. When you have a jurisdiction that is willing to take the pioneering political steps, as municipalities have, then we should allow them to retain those powers.

In fact, the Canadian Cancer Society supports that position. The cancer society—we all know the volunteers who drive people to their chemotherapy and radiation appointments. They know concretely what happens to people when they have to deal with cancer. They don't want the ability to move forward on this file fenced in, blocked, contained by provincial legislation. If we look at the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, it has a provision that allows municipalities to set a higher standard. That's the example we should be following.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: What don't they want to do? What do you think?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: There are many questions that have to be answered—many questions.

The second issue here is the lack of pesticide reduction plans for golf courses. This exemption has drawn a lot of attention. The act states that golf courses are exempt from the pesticide ban as long as "any prescribed conditions have been met," which the government is claiming means that they intend to require golf courses to develop and submit integrated pest management plans that aim to reduce their pesticide use over time. However, that's not in the legislation. You can go through its three or four pages, a pretty quick read, and you don't find anything in there that actually makes that claim real. We've gone through this before with the McGuinty government saying, "Trust us," as an approach to legislation.

Just last week Environmental Defence, and Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment, issued a joint press release outlining how the McGuinty government had posted a permit to take water on the Environmental Bill of Rights on behalf of St. Marys Cement for a 30-day consultation. This permit to take water is with respect to a quarry that St. Marys Cement is proposing near Flamborough in southwestern Ontario, and requires the use of an unproven and theoretical groundwater recirculation system, pretty much similar to the one the McGuinty government allowed to be used when they approved the Milton quarry expansion.

What Environmental Defence is concerned about here is that the government is permitting an unproven and reckless permit to take water at the same time as it's doing the source water protection planning in this area. So when you talk about protecting the environment, and then in practice you fall short of the mark, people become very skeptical that these issues will be addressed in the regulations and skeptical that we're going to see something stronger than what's in the act. In fact, the act is probably the high water mark and it will slip from there. So we will be proposing amendments in the course of the debate in committee to require golf courses to reduce their use of pesticides and have that in the act itself.

The third concern we have is excepted uses, which, as stated, are far too broad. Again, the Canadian Cancer Society is urging the government to amend the bill so that that broad "excepted uses" section is taken out. At present, "excepted uses such as golf courses, agriculture, forestry and public health and safety under the act include a provision that allows the minister to add further exceptions as required." That clause needs to be removed. If those categories are not sufficient, then you have to ask yourself, "What exactly are they trying to provide an exemption for? What uses are going to be given an exemption? What political pressure can be applied to a cabinet or a government in a situation where someone says, 'You know, it's a wonderful act. I'm glad you have it. Thank goodness you came forward and did it. But really, in my case, I need an exemption'?" I don't know what exemption they'll ask for, and frankly, that's going to be a risk. If you have a concern, if there are legitimate public health and safety concerns, then utilize that section to protect the public and give the flexibility to the government that it needs. But essentially, to write a blank cheque in the legislation for future exemptions is not a useful step.

I want to thank the cities and the environmental activists who've actually pressed things over almost two decades. They move the agenda forward. They set the political space. They set the tone and the direction that this government has followed—once again a follower, not a leader. I look forward to further debate and discussion about this bill in committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: This act is another example of our government's commitment to improving our natural environment for present and future generations. By banning the sale and the use of cosmetic pesticides, the Liberal government is taking a proactive approach to addressing possible health and environmental risks associated with pesticide use. Our children should feel free to play in the grass and enjoy the pleasures of playing outdoors without unnecessary health risks attributed to the use of cosmetic pesticides. It is time that together, as a province, we begin to move forward with strong environmental legislation to protect our health and safety and preserve our natural heritage.

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With so many alternatives available, there is absolutely no reason for the continued use of these potentially harmful chemicals in Ontario neighbourhoods. Rather than apply the wait-and-see approach to test the connection between childhood cancer and cosmetic pesticides use, every member of this Legislature should be eager to support this precautionary bill that is designed to prevent illness as a result of the unnecessary use of cosmetic pesticides.

When I was part of the city of Ottawa, we tried to implement a cosmetic pesticide ban. The pesticide purveyors proved relentless in their determination to prevent any effort to ensure the health and safety of our city's children. As a result, Ottawa did not succeed in implementing a pesticide ban. They tried it again last year. That is why this piece of legislation is so necessary and why I am in full support of our government's ongoing efforts to protect the health and safety of the citizens of Ontario.

I urge all members of the opposition who are opposed to this legislation to visit the local children's cancer ward and speak with their children and families and try to understand why this piece of legislation is so absolutely necessary. I spent three years doing that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to say that I agree 100% with our environmental critic in terms of everything that has been stated. I will speak to what he might have disagreed with me on, and I'll restate it just to see, for the record, whether that's the issue.

But on most of the other issues we, as New Democrats, welcome provincial action to ban the application of pesticides for aesthetic purposes. We agree with that. We are concerned, and to re-emphasize the point that my colleague from Toronto–Danforth made, that municipalities are not permitted to set a higher standard, and that is a mistake. I can't fathom the reason that the government has allowed that. You're setting a minimum standard for all municipalities across Ontario. This is okay, but why not allow municipalities to set a higher standard? This is something that I find incomprehensible, and of course, Liberals are very silent on this issue, because I haven't heard one person speak to that.

Then I talk to the whole problem of golf courses, because there are no legislated pesticide reduction plans for golf courses, and I'm concerned for the health of golf players on two levels. One is that golf is bad for your health because I believe it contributes to bigness, which I think is a health hazard. I believe golf players should walk and not be driven on those little carts to pick up the balls. I've got to tell you, I think they should stop all the use of drinks because for every bottle of beer you drink, it's 200 calories. I've got to tell you, golf players, I'm worried. When you pick up that ball and pesticides are on that grass, I'm worried about you for those reasons.

We need to create higher standards for golf courses, and that was the point I wanted to make earlier.

Mr. Bob Delaney: The member for Toronto–Danforth made an impassioned plea with regard to whether a municipality should be setting a higher standard. I ask the member to consider, for example: What if we applied his argument as he presented to us to something like, say, the Liquor Control Act? Would he suggest that, for example, Toronto could have a higher standard than Mississauga and say, "Well, you know, in puritanical Mississauga, it's only 19, but in Toronto we'll raise the standard for the age of drinking to, say, age 21"?

I think the intent of this bill—and I don't mean to trivialize it by using that example—is to set a uniform standard and avoid a patchwork quilt of regulations, to allow people in the marketplace, whether they be purveyors or customers, to have a level, predictable playing field.

This morning, I was in Ottawa at the Canadian science fair competition, and I was absolutely stunned to see the number of science fair competitors who were all bringing out various ways, coincidentally, of substituting pesticides with natural ingredients and using different means of application, different blends of things—as innocuous as cinnamon, vinegar, garlic and a handful of other things—and to use them to control the growth of weeds. I think we're probably at the beginning of a phase in which we're going to see some clean, green technology, things that will replace the use of heavy-duty chemical pesticides. I think one of the things that this bill does is that, by raising that common standard and creating the level playing field, we are going to, through legislation and regulations, create a climate in which people who have clean, green solutions are going to be able to improve the control of weeds.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member from Toronto–Danforth and to the comments from some of the other members, including the member from Trinity–Spadina, who seems to be concerned about big golfers and whether they ride or walk on the golf course.

This bill, Bill 64, the Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act—I certainly have a lot of questions about it. I'm in favour of reducing the use of pesticides. I thought the PC critic did a good job of talking about and educating people about pesticides and herbicides and what they're used for. I know the minister, earlier in the afternoon, talked about the fact that using pesticides on our lawns was a bad thing because kids wouldn't be able to read the signs. I guess I'd have to ask the question: What about the kids who are going on a golf course and picking up their golf ball? Why is it okay that we can use pesticides in agriculture and eat food sprayed with pesticides, and yet we can't walk on a lawn? I think these are some reasonable questions to ask.

I certainly support the goal of reducing the use of pesticides, although I'm sure they're in use for a reason. Sometimes by not using them we can have health concerns because of the pests, whether that might be some types of plants that grow or other types of pests that will be in abundance because we don't use them. So we have to measure those health risks as well.

I think this bill is about the government reacting to political science, and not necessarily based on actual science. That tends to be the way this government puts forward a lot of its legislation and gets its ideas for legislation. It's based on political science.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Toronto–Danforth, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the comments from the members from Ottawa–Orléans, Trinity–Spadina, Mississauga–Streetsville and Parry Sound–Muskoka.

In terms of this government taking a leading role, I have to ask: Where was this government in 2004-05 when the city of Toronto fought this issue all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada? Where were they? They left another level of government to fight a battle that had to be fought and followed later when someone else had done all the pioneering work and all the clearing work. So I would say again that this government is not leading; it's following what has been done by pioneering jurisdictions at another level.

The member for Mississauga–Streetsville talked about the problems with allowing municipalities to set a higher standard. In fact, in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act—and I don't know whether he voted for it or against it—they have the ability to set a higher standard. In fact, it's municipalities, in the work that they have done setting standards, that have allowed governments like this to actually follow along.

When I was fighting for smoke-free bars and restaurants in Toronto in the 1990s, we had this fight all the

time: "Why don't you leave it to the province? Why don't you wait for the province to act?" Well, forget it. You know where the actual pioneering work happens, where the progressive action actually happens. This is not a question of a patchwork quilt; it's a question of making sure that you have the ability for those new ideas to actually break through the surface. Giving municipalities or leaving municipalities with the power to act and set legislation is crucial.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

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Mr. Mike Colle: I have to rise up in the defence of golfers everywhere in light of the fact that the member for Trinity–Spadina has condemned all these golfers in this room.

Anyway, I just want to speak on a very important piece of legislation. There is a growing awareness by everybody that for many years we have used chemicals unwisely, whether it be on our lawns, our fruit trees, our plants or around our homes. This is really done not for health reasons but for cosmetic reasons. It's for appearance. We know all the attempts we've made to get rid of that infernal dandelion and the times we've tried to use overkill, you might say, to stamp out something that is really not necessarily that harmful. So we've gone to the easy quick fix, which is the use of a chemical.

Chemical usage is really a result of a lack of knowledge, a lack of understanding and a lack of sufficient information for the public. The public really isn't expected to keep up to date with the harmful side effects of things because it's very complex and you get competing views. You've heard the Conservative opposition saying, "Well, Health Canada says it's okay." Well, I think I'd rather take a second opinion on that. We've heard what the cancer society has said, what the Ontario Medical Association has said, what David Suzuki has said: There is an overdependence on the use of chemicals in terms of the appearance of our properties—private properties especially.

This is what this bill primarily deals with. It says, "Instead of using chemicals, try to use alternative ways of dealing with an unwanted plant or plants, and use an intelligent alternative rather than having a dependency on chemicals." That's what this bill is all about.

What it's trying to do is ensure that there are province-wide benchmarks on the control of the use of these chemicals, so that you don't have a situation where Mississauga would have one set of rules, Brampton, next door, would have another, Caledon would have another set, and then next door in Toronto—that's what's going to happen. That's why the province steps in to try and bring about a series of benchmarks that are easily identifiable, so there isn't this hodgepodge of bylaws and it eliminates the confusion that exists.

This has happened before, with the smoking bylaws. It has happened with a series of other municipally led legislative initiatives, which are good, because municipalities are sometimes closest to the ground on these issues and they come up with some very interesting proposals that eventually need province-wide standards. That's what this bill is attempting to do.

We always think that the practices of today are okay unless someone gives us a warning that we should be very cautious about what we use. I don't want to name-drop, but I was talking to the leader of the Green Party this weekend, Elizabeth May. She said, "One time in Nova Scotia, in the 1970s, they were using Agent Orange to control the growth of noxious weeds etc. and to kill off hazardous plant byproducts." Agent Orange was used in the Vietnam war to defoliate Vietnam, and that was used in Nova Scotia by the federal government, by the Ministry of National Defence. "Well, Health Canada said Agent Orange is okay." I'm not trying to point fingers at the Ministry of National Defence or Health Canada, but this is the type of mentality that leads to all kinds of incredibly bad consequences to the health of not only the human species but also animal and plant species.

This is the kind of paradigm shift that is taking place not only in Ontario, but this paradigm shift about how we use chemicals, what we do with our waste and how we treat our natural surroundings is being dealt with by governments at all levels. Look at Naples, in Italy. The city is in a quagmire because for years they haven't done anything with their waste. The seepage of all these chemicals—even the mozzarella in Naples is not safe to eat because they haven't taken care of the waste products—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The bufala mozzarella.

Mr. Mike Colle: The bufala mozzarella; I'm just giving that as an anecdote, so whether it's the food we eat, because the pesticides not only affect—we talk about dandelion control, but we're talking about the food we eat.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I love dandelions.

Mr. Mike Colle: The ironic thing is—I know the member from Trinity–Spadina understands this well—someone's weed is someone else's food. I can recall that years ago we used to go with my now late father up to the Brantford line railroad track, that runs from Union Station all the way up to Brantford, and pick arugula weed.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Dandelion.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's in the dandelion family. We would take that home and transplant it and eat the weed, the dandelion.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Before it flowers, don't forget.

Mr. Mike Colle: Yes. We have heard the stories about dandelion wine etc. So there's no need to use chemicals on everything you see that is unwanted on your property. That's been the easy way of dealing with hazardous, so called—not hazardous. What I really mean to say is products that you may consider unsightly. You want to have that perfect lawn, with the perfect blades of grass that look emerald green.

Many people are now getting rid of their lawns. They're going to the natural lawn, where you plant natural flowers around rocks, and you don't have to use

all the fertilizer or do all the watering. You don't have to use all those chemicals.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And you don't have to cut the grass.

Mr. Mike Colle: You don't have to cut the grass, on top of it, and that is the trend. I know in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence, more and more people are taking out their lawns and planting native species.

In fact, Green Toronto is an organization that gives people advice on how to do that. That's what I think this bill does. Not only does it regulate the sale of these pesticides—because it's too easy. You go to Canadian Tire or to Home Depot and there's a row about as long as this Legislature, Mr. Speaker. Maybe down in Essex it's the same thing. You go to the tractor supply company and there's a whole row of these chemicals sitting there on the shelf. Every company in the world is making these chemicals, and it's too easy to pick up a chemical and pour it into the ground around your house. So what this is saying is for cosmetic use—not for agricultural use but for cosmetic use—we city folks especially should stay away from these pesticides, because whatever goes into the ground goes into the water table, and it will be there for maybe five years, 10 years, 500 years. Those chemicals will be there forever and they don't disappear.

If you avoid using these chemicals, you're basically ensuring that your own children, your own pets, your neighbours, everybody will be better protected. Do you really need to use those chemicals on your private property to have that perfect lawn? You don't. There's no imperative for you to have a chemically green lawn. In fact, the labels on some of those brand names—they call them Chem-Green or all these things—are just basically using chemicals artificially to almost paint the front part of your house. You don't need that.

The legislation, Bill 64, is an attempt by the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Environment, to say that we want to educate people, we want to set province-wide benchmarks on the prohibition of the sale of these cosmetic chemicals and think of alternative ways of dealing with so-called weeds or the so-called aesthetic appearance of your front and back lawns, and that your private property is something you've got to analyze and to maybe look at an alternative.

What this is the beginning of is, I think, that you'll see more and more people not going to the chemicals row at Canadian Tire, and instead they'll go to the garden centre and buy some natural, indigenous plants. They can still do better gardening, because there are no brains involved in just planting sod, the green lawn. But if you're planting the right flowers, the right plants, if you're putting in a few tomatoes, perhaps a few zucchinis—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Cucumbers?

Mr. Mike Colle: —with cucumbers on the side, it's much more natural than just this green carpet. Some people have said, "Why not just get rid of the lawn altogether and buy some carpet at Canadian Tire and just glue the carpet to the front of your driveway? Then you don't have to cut it."

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What I'm trying to get at is that it's critically important for us to be more sensitive to the water we drink and the fruit and vegetables we eat, because all that chemical use is interconnected to the food we eat and the air we breathe. It eventually does us and our environmental footprint damage, because there is no way of reassuring anyone. Would you want to reassure your children or your grandchildren that these chemicals are okay? You know, "Just step aside while I spray"? They used to spray DDT all over the place. They used to have the spray bombs in the backyard. You would go to cottage country, and they would hire companies that came in, and to get rid of mosquitoes, they would do these huge sprayings of whole cottage lots. They were getting rid of the mosquitoes with the use of this chemical, but what harm were they doing to the water table at your cottage? It was seeping into the trees, into the ground, into the water table, and the air that you would breathe or that the birds would breathe. They wondered why there were no birds left at the cottage. There used to be all these birds at the cottage. They all disappeared. Well, you sprayed them all with DDT.

This is the type of thing that used to take place. People are much wiser, smarter now. They're no longer depending on chemicals. I think the public, in many ways, is ahead of government. That's why the public is very supportive of the control of these chemicals for cosmetic use. This is an attempt again by the government to partner with the public, which is now looking for ways to protect everyone in the community. It is of no value if one person stops the use of these pesticides and chemicals, and you have two neighbours next door or down the street who are spraying away, pouring chemicals into their lawn, and killing every dandelion that dares show its head. We have to have a common policy where these chemicals will not be as readily available, where the chemical aisles at Canadian Tire will no longer be as large, at least, and where the variety of all these chemicals will be used with great care and caution, because there is no telling the side effects of these chemicals until, in many cases, it's too late. As the good doctor from Etobicoke North has said, this is about health, it's about enjoyment of your open space, and it's about ensuring there are provincial standards for the chemicals you use.

I look at the young pages here. If you go to your home and look in the garage, look in the basement, you can see how many chemicals we all have in our own homes, which we've kept around for years, in some cases. Why do we need all these chemicals, especially those of us who live in the middle of the city?

Therefore, I applaud Minister Gerretsen for putting all this together in a piece of legislation, which begins to set standards for the whole province. I look forward to the debate and the additions that the opposition may put forward. But I do know that the public, certainly in the city of Toronto and in my riding, is very supportive of pesticide control. I haven't heard one person say, "This is

something I don't want." They are all looking for leadership in this area. I think many people may say they want it stronger, and I think there's always room to make legislation stronger. But there's basically consensus that the time has passed for the use of chemicals for appearance's sake on our front lawns, especially, and in our backyards, and we all have to look at ourselves and see how we can do a better job.

It's not only what government is doing. I think this legislation essentially makes us reflect on what we do with our natural surroundings, and what we can do better. No one is perfect, but we can all learn from each other. That's why I think this piece of legislation will make people discuss this issue. Hopefully in schools they'll talk about this kind of control of the use of chemicals for cosmetic appearances and there will be greater awareness about the fact that many of these chemicals are going to be imposed on our neighbours and our future generations when they don't need to be. There is no need to have that perfect lawn, with every blade of grass in place. There's no need for that.

We hope this legislation will start to make us think a bit laterally and start to do things in a more natural way. It will save us money, because chemicals cost big dollars, and it will also save the air we breathe and the water table, especially in an urban environment. On some streets in the city of Toronto—I look at Atlas Avenue, Winnette Avenue and Livingstone Avenue—there are 18- and 20-foot lots, house after house after house. You can imagine the impact if everybody on those streets is using chemicals. The cumulative effect on the water table is quite astounding. In many parts of Toronto, as the member from Trinity–Spadina knows, there are many underground rivers. That seepage goes into the underground rivers and eventually into the main tributaries—the Humber River and the Don River—and into Lake Ontario. We don't need all those Canadian Tire chemicals in Lake Ontario. That's where they'll end up. We sometimes wonder why we can't swim and why the fish are dying.

As I said, you can now finally catch salmon in Lake Ontario. There was even an Atlantic salmon spotted in the Humber River just recently. We are better stewards of the environment. It's coming. We're not perfect, but I think legislation like this can help move us toward more understanding and appreciation of the vulnerability of the species, especially in our urban environment, and certainly in the environment in Ontario. Again, the plant species—the incredible number of trees we have in this province, the natural flowers and the trillium, such a fragile flower that is our provincial symbol—are also what this is about. It's about trying to be a bit more sensitive to how we use chemicals and not to use them indiscriminately.

I think it's a good step forward. I hope the members will bring forth their views, make this a good bill and do something that is, I think, part of where the public is, and join the public in making our place a little less chemical-dependent and more nature-dependent.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Who can argue against creating a healthier environment, not only for our children but for all our population? My concern is when we do that based on political science instead of real science. My concern is that we have a bill that is three pages long—not much detail in that bill. What's going to happen is that the real stuff that comes out of this is going to be created when regulations are formed, and we all know that that's done behind closed doors and without the ability for public input. The public can input to these three short pages and hope that whatever advice, experience and observations they provide will be taken back to help form the regulations. But at this time, the devil is in the details. There are no regulations. We have three short pages on which to try to make some comment.

It's a scare tactic to say that 4% of the population is using pesticides that are going to adversely affect all of us, and yet exempt the large number of users that form that other 96%. I'm having a hard time understanding that. We can eat the produce after pesticide is applied, but we can't walk on the grass when pesticide is applied. There's a little logic there that's being missed by me.

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I think the specifics of this legislation are going to be interesting, and it is my hope, through the committee debate and the delegations that are made, that we can make changes in this bill that will actually make it a strong, viable piece of legislation.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to say that I agree with most of the comments made by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence on the issue of chemicals. I have to tell you, I have been preoccupied with the proliferation of chemicals in general and pesticides in particular, because there are thousands of chemicals that are used for many different purposes.

I am one who believes that it is deranging our physiology in ways that we cannot determine. Most people don't even bother to think about how that's affecting our bodies, but I happen to believe that it's affecting our bodies in ways that we do not comprehend and it will affect the bodies of our children for hundreds of years to come.

You will have some people saying, "Well, we don't have the science to determine this." I think we do, and I don't believe we're looking for the science to prove that some of these chemicals are affecting us in ways that we ought to know and ought to understand.

I also want to say that our water purification systems do not work on most chemicals. Most of the chemicals pass through the water purification system and get into our bodies. It doesn't really work. Chemicals, in my view, are destructive.

But there are things that we can do to make this bill better. We said yes to a minimum provincial standard, but where municipalities can do better, why wouldn't we allow for that? We're not arguing against a minimum

standard, but if municipalities can do better, why would you say no? That's what puzzles me.

Yes, I am worried about the golf players and their health. I believe that chasing a bigger ball, playing soccer, is better for your health than going with a cart to pick up a little ball. I prefer soccer as a way of keeping slim versus golf as a way of, obviously, being obese. So I'm worried about you golfers and I'm worried about the chemicals that are in the grass when you bend over to pick up the ball. I'm going to state that for the record again and again.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to rise in this House and to speak on Bill 64, the banning of the non-essential use of cosmetic pesticides.

As we all know, chemicals are hazardous. Some chemicals are hazardous to our environment, and this bill is for the protection of the environment and for the protection of people. That's why this bill has been brought forward to this House. I should commend the Minister of the Environment for listening to the public, for hearing what the public is asking us as a government, to bring this legislation to the House, and hopefully it will pass the House and come into effect.

Part of this bill is about educating the public. There is a major component on public education on the use of natural products to protect our lawns. As my colleague mentioned, we have to create a culture in our houses, in our backyards and even in our front yards to use domestic and indigenous plants. For example, why not get into the habit of creating some vegetable gardens—to create and to grow our own gardens, to grow our own vegetables, our food—so we can basically be both growing our own food and also having a green space in our backyards?

I support this piece of legislation. That is the way we should go. We need to protect our environment. We need to protect our people. We can't just inject tonnes and tonnes of chemicals into the soil which will end up in lakes and in rivers and will affect our environment. This is a time to protect our environment and also our people.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The intent that we have before us with Bill 64 is to prohibit the use and sale of pesticides for cosmetic and non-essential purposes—there's no argument there—with the exception of the fact that there would be exemptions to various sectors, an issue which I do find troubling. The proposed legislation would supersede municipal pesticide bylaws, making them null and void. The specifics of this legislation are unknown.

In my riding of Dufferin–Caledon, the town of Caledon spent two years consulting, educating and informing their residents about the intent to proceed with a pesticide bylaw. They spent a good chunk of that time discussing with the agricultural sector how they could work together to educate, inform and ultimately ensure that the pesticide bylaw was followed.

There seems to be a common thread in the last couple of pieces of proposed legislation that we've talked about. It's that there's no detail in the bills as we debate them. All of the detail happens at the regulation stage. Of course, when stakeholders—Ontario municipalities—don't know what those regulations are going to be, that's where the uncertainty comes in, and that's where the nervousness comes in.

If this is something that you believe in so strongly as a government, it's really unfortunate that you wouldn't be forthright and actually set out in the legislation what you're going to ban, how you're going to do it, how you're going to proceed. It is unfortunate that so much of the detail has been left to regulation. I would hope that would change in future legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Eglinton-Lawrence, have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to thank the members for Burlington, Trinity–Spadina, Richmond Hill and Dufferin–Caledon for their input. As the member for Toronto–Danforth was saying, municipalities have gone through this debate ad infinitum, for decades. It's a no-brainer to the municipalities. Pesticides kill. They are dangerous.

So here we are, trying to say that there's got to be a common standard so everybody across the province is protected. It has already been proven by the years and years of work that doctors have been doing on the ground in every municipality that has taken this issue on. They've debated this for years in the city of Toronto, Oakville etc.

All we're saying is, let's err on the side of caution here, for our children and for our future generations. If you look at the GTA alone, there must be what, three million households? If they're all pouring chemicals under their front lawn and back lawn, day after day in the summer, there's a chance that those chemicals may impact the water we drink, that they may impact the soil.

Who's going to say, "Don't worry, that's okay"? That's what some people across the way are saying. The Conservative side is saying, "Oh, we need the specifics." To the public out there, it's a no-brainer. These chemicals, by the millions of households, are going to possibly cause some kind of health risk to our children, to our children's children, to our species, to our wildlife, to our plant life.

So let's get on with it and say no to these chemicals for cosmetic purposes. Just so your grass looks green, let's take a risk with the health of future generations? People are saying, "Don't do that."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: It's difficult dealing with this bill because it affects such a small part of the use of pesticides and herbicides in the province, and there's so much fear-mongering by the government, particularly the last speaker, with regard to the tragic effects that pesticides and herbicides can have on the population, without any basis, scientific basis, studies etc., being brought before the Legislature.

I'm not asking for a slam-dunk in all this, but I want to know why there are no studies or no supporting material with this bill to justify taking away from the public at

large the opportunity to have a beautiful garden. If there is a serious risk, I am quite willing to support the government on this bill, but I don't know if there is a significant risk.

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Nobody has even talked in this Legislature about how the control of pesticides and herbicides occurs in our society. Number one is, we have the product. The product must go through extensive testing, and is reviewed at the federal level by the most renowned scientists in the country. The federal level then puts restrictions on any kind of pesticide or herbicide where they see a significant risk.

This is a very non-political, outstanding board of some of our most eminent citizens and scientists. First of all, they look at the product and say, "What are the risks in society having this product? Will it cause cancer? Will it cause skin disease? Will it cause people who have respiratory diseases..." etc. They go through all of the risks and decide that the product can be sold and used safely in our society. They say it. Scientists—not politicians—say it.

Then it comes down to the provincial level, and we have the pesticides review board. For the particular chemicals that have passed all the tests, have had the scientists say that these materials can be used in a safe manner, the pesticides review board in Ontario says, "They must be applied this particular way." Some of them can only be applied by licensed operators, licensed technicians, and those licensed technicians include our farming community. Our farming community has to go and get trained to use these particular substances time and time again. We also have people in our residential communities who are licensed to apply these pesticides to our lawns, etc.

But if there's a real danger and a real risk, then I'm all for banning them. I agree with the members opposite that the health risk is much more important than having a good-looking lawn, but let's do this with some kind of notion that we're overriding some of the most eminent scientists in our country by bringing forward a bill which just says, "It's done." There are no studies being offered by the Minister of the Environment; there's nothing here except our fears that somebody has said that this is bad.

I believe that I have a record in this Legislature in terms of health care concerns. When in 1975 the World Health Organization said that eliminating smoking would be the single greatest move that governments could get involved in, I was the first politician not just in Ontario but in Canada to bring forward a piece of legislation here in this Legislature to ban smoking in public places and control smoking in workplaces. I was the first politician, but I did that on the basis that the World Health Organization had had extensive studies and had said, "This is a way it is." I didn't believe what the tobacco manufacturers said with regard to either first- or second-hand smoke; I believed what the scientists said. And I believe that when we make environmental regulation here, we have to pay heed to the economic, health and environmental effects of what we do every day in our society.

I also want to point out, as my colleagues and the member from the NDP have pointed out, that this is a very sketchy bill—it's three pages—and allows the government to effectively move this regulation around at will as it goes forward.

First of all, I'll read some of the sections of it. Defining one of the words, it says, "'cosmetic' means non-essential." I don't know what that means totally in terms of what happens. For instance, if I have a granddaughter who suffers from hay fever, can I go out and spray my backyard for weeds that cause hay fever? Is that essential or non-essential? If I have a driveway that has cracks in it and it's going to ruin my driveway if the weeds continue to grow, and I put some Roundup on it, is that essential or non-essential? I don't know what the limitations of this are.

If the government decides to spray for mosquitoes because of a West Nile threat, does that come under the act? Are they blocked from doing that particular spraying? Is that cosmetic or not? Who decides whether there's a West Nile threat? Does one person have to become sick or die, or is it an epidemic that happens? We know that West Nile, over the last four or five years, seems to have come and gone, and has appeared in some communities but not others. So the legislation doesn't have any real clear definitions.

But I guess my greatest concern with it is—I think it's a very popular thing for politicians to do. We're going to scare the heck out of you by saying, "Put a pesticide down and it could cause you problems." Well, just about anything we do in society could cause us problems. I don't know what "cosmetic" means. If all of our lawns grow up in weeds, I don't know what that means in terms of other economic benefits or losses in our communities.

I also want to just comment briefly with regard to my friend Mr. Marchese from Trinity–Spadina. He seems to have this belief that the people on golf courses are elite people, fat people, white collar people; that it's a sport for the rich. I've got to tell him, he should go to one of the public golf courses. Go to Don Valley, up the road here, and watch the people. First of all, half the people on public courses walk the courses. A lot of them walk the courses. Secondly, he would be really surprised to find a lot of workers who go out there and enjoy their day off in terms of what they're doing.

I also might add—because I know some of the golf course owners in Ottawa West, the area that I represent—that the control over pesticides and herbicides on golf courses in Ontario is much stricter than in any other North American jurisdiction. They are severely restricted under our past environmental regulations with regard to what they can put on their course, when they can put it on the course and how they can put it on the course. So this province has led for a long time in that regard.

I want to read from the Ottawa Citizen of April 27. I think this really sums up this piece of legislation. This is by Randall Denley of the Ottawa Citizen:

"Pesticides banned. Clotheslines restored. If the environment could be saved with symbolic gestures, Premier Dalton McGuinty would be doing a heck of a job.

"McGuinty's pesticide ban, announced on Earth Day, will be popular with urban voters but it won't actually do much for the environment. The first question a rational person would have is, how much will this ban reduce overall pesticide use? The Ministry of the Environment professes to be stumped by that one." In other words, they don't even know how much it's going to affect.

"Fair enough. When a government is banning something for public relations purposes, it doesn't really matter what the actual effect of the ban is, does it?

1700

"According to a 2000 federal standing committee report, agricultural use accounts for 91% of all pesticides. Banning only home use will have a limited effect on overall pesticide use, but the Premier was quick to inform farmers that the ban won't apply to them. Actually, it will apply to their farmhouse lawns and their home vegetable gardens, but out in the fields, they can let her rip.

"This has always been one of the curious parts of the anti-pesticide campaign. These chemicals are popularly described as 'toxic,' but then we are told that it's okay to use them on food we will eat, but not on our lawns.

"Health Canada has the job of determining what pesticides are safe to use and how they should be used. Those decisions, while questioned by some, are based on science. While the provincial government states that 'studies by public health experts are showing growing evidence of the potential health risk of pesticides,' this ban is clearly based on public opinion, not research.

"A spokesman for the environment ministry reflected the depth of government thinking when he said that it was okay to continue the use of pesticides for agriculture because the government has faith in people licensed to apply those pesticides. In the next breath, he said that people licensed to apply pesticides to lawns shouldn't be allowed to continue doing so."

So you license people on the farm—that's okay, buddy, they can do this safely—but it's not okay for licensed people to put it on lawns.

This columnist says, "The ban relies partly on the 'homeowner is an idiot' argument. The impression is that pesticide-loving homeowners spray the stuff around every chance they get"—we heard that from the last government speaker. "Because the average person has no judgment, the only safe course is a ban that takes the spray can out of his hands," because he's an idiot. That's what this guy says.

"Any thinking gardener uses pesticides judiciously and as a last resort, but there are some problems that are difficult or impossible to control 'naturally.' There is a reason, for example, why commercial fruit growers spray their trees. Apple scab isn't an aesthetic issue. It renders the fruit inedible. Similarly, various flower-killing bugs just don't fall prey to the old soap and water solutions."

Then they go to the Ottawa city councillors, who in 2005 tried to ban them but became so entangled in the complexities that the issue collapsed altogether. One thing I would add is that I agree that this is a matter for the provincial Legislature or the federal Parliament to deal with—I don't think it is a matter that municipalities should deal with—because I think it requires the kind of scientific studies I'm talking about to come to the right conclusions to make an enforceable law to deal with these particular pesticides and herbicides.

"The pesticide ban is bold compared to the lifting of the clothesline ban." Do you remember that Dalton did that? "It's just embarrassing to see the Premier of Canada's largest province spending his time on something so trivial. Again, very few people are affected and very little action will result.

"Clotheslines are perfectly legal in almost every part of Ottawa, but one rarely sees a clothesline in use. Sure, people could haul their laundry into the backyard and hang it up, but that doesn't exactly fit the modern lifestyle. Much easier to dump it in the adjacent dryer and burn up a few cents of electricity."

This is a quote by McGuinty: "'We want parents to have the choice to use the wind and the sun to dry their clothes for free.'" McGuinty said. Nice to know the chronic banner believes people can make some choices, but this isn't one they are likely to go for.

"If McGuinty wants real results, maybe he should ban the clothes dryer. People hanging up freezing laundry in" the middle of "January might not like it, but who said saving the planet would be easy?

"While he's at it, maybe he could order people down to the river to beat their laundry on the rocks. The phosphates might be" a problem, though.

"Meanwhile, Ontario's coal-fired generators continue to spew greenhouse gases into the atmosphere"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm sure the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills is going to bring this back to Bill 64.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: You can rely on me to do that.

"Meanwhile, Ontario's coal-fired" generation plants "continue to spew greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Not to worry: The Premier has promised to close them." Was it 2007 or 2014?

Interjections.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: There was 2007, 2009, and now 2014. Are they closed now? No they're not; I don't think so.

But now he says "2014." This time "he's probably really serious." Well, that is the light we take the environmental legislation that is being brought before us today in.

I also want to say that this law will be virtually unenforceable. If 96% of the pesticides and herbicides are still going to be available for sale to various members of the community, I have to believe that those who want pesticides and herbicides are going to have them in the future. This is a very difficult bill to vote against, because

once the fear is thrown out in such an irrational and illogical way by the government, it's very difficult for one to argue in a logical way.

I look forward to the hearings that are coming up. I want to hear from people who suffer from asthmatic problems; I want to hear whether not being able to deal with the weeds in their backyard is going to cause them grief. I want to hear from the government as to the science and the analysis that they have done with regard to the risks associated with putting down these chemicals. I want to hear from citizens who have vegetable gardens in their backyards and are unable to dust their potato plants. Try to grow a potato plant without dusting it for pesticides. You don't get any potatoes. I want to hear from people who are sane and logical about this issue. I don't want to hear from fear-mongering people who do not have facts and studies behind what they say.

I believe that the environment is very important to all of us, but this bill certainly fails, in my view, to show this government as having a real concern about our environment. Let's get at the real problems. This bill does not do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

M^me^ France Gélinas: I must say that I agree with the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills that we need increased research and education on the ill effects of pesticides on human health, but we already know that pesticide-related poisoning and illness constitutes a major public health issue. By contrast, there is absolutely no health benefit to the cosmetic use of pesticides.

When we talk about pesticides, we really talk about insecticides, herbicides and fungicides. We have to realize that all of those are designed to kill living organisms. They kill indiscriminately. That means that really only 5% of the pesticides actually reach their targets. The rest of them, the residues are spread by water, by wind. They're found everywhere from inside polar bear fat to human breast milk.

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It brings all sorts of trouble. The World Health Organization estimates that 200,000 people are killed worldwide each year because of pesticides, and another three million are poisoned. Most of them—that is, over 50% of them—are kids under the age of 10. Scientific evidence also shows a positive association between the exposure to pesticides and a number of serious cancers, such as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, leukemia, brain cancer, kidney cancer, pancreatic cancer, prostate cancer and lung cancer.

There is no good health reason to use pesticides. But the bill doesn't go far enough: You need to improve section 7.1 so that it does not prevent municipalities from imposing more stringent requirements, and you need to consider a white list rather than a blacklist approach, so that new components can be added effectively and securely.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker—

Applause.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: And thank you to my esteemed colleagues for that show of support.

I would like to first of all salute the remarks from my NDP colleague across the way here because I think she has very adequately and specifically highlighted some of the problems, whether it's the United Nations World Health Organization's commentary on the indiscriminate use of pesticides globally and the impact on death and disease—and, of course, her poignant description, the use of the word "residues."

I can tell you, as a physician, that it's actually relatively difficult to show immediate and proximal causality. What that means is, "This chemical causes this disease in a recognizable time frame." But using the example of smoking, tobacco, nicotine poisoning and tar-based diseases, this, first of all, is something that took medical science and, by extension, the public and society approximately a generation to recognize, whether it was through first-hand smoking, second-hand smoking, the ill effects of smoking passed on through the generations, various forms of cancer and so on.

I think it's important that those of us here, entrusted with the stewardship of our environment and of the chemical milieu that we expose ourselves to, actually take signals from the environment that are important and that we are able to act on. The banning of the cosmetic use of pesticides and, of course, the banning of cellphone use in this chamber are also part of environmental pollution control.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to comment on the speech made by the member to do with Bill 64. I think he raised some very valid points, particularly about how this bill is really more legislation that was developed for public relations, and really, as with a lot of the legislation from this government, developed by polling the public. We know that roughly 70% of the people in the province support banning the cosmetic use of pesticides, and I think that's why this government has brought this legislation forward.

As was pointed out by the member, it's very thin legislation. It's all of three pages long. He raised some good concerns: We should be basing our legislation on real science, not political science. In the bill, it talks about what cosmetic use is—that means "non-essential." Does that mean that when there's a West Nile outbreak or a risk of West Nile disease that we cannot, as the government has done in the past, treat bodies of water where insects and mosquitoes may grow and of course carry the disease? Will that be allowed after this legislation passes or not?

We note that the bill is really affecting some 4% or 5% of the use of pesticides and that the section with the exemptions really exempts up to about 95% of the use of pesticides in the province, so that is certainly a good question of concern. If pesticides are bad for your lawn, why are they okay for food that we're going to eat? I think it's a very valid question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills: You have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Thank you to all those who participated in the questions and comments. I'd like particularly to talk with regard to the member from Etobicoke North's response. I think it was embraced in his words "the indiscriminate use of pesticides or herbicides."

We all are against that, but this legislation, as I read it, would ban trained applicators from applying pesticides and herbicides to lawns or parks or to any other kind of place in our society. So we're not talking about indiscriminate use; we're talking about discriminate use by people who are trained in how to safely apply these particular products.

I am saying that I want to listen very closely to what happens in the committee. I think it's really important that not only people come forward with opinions about what they think is right or wrong; I want to see evidence as to what the risk is, what the benefit is and what the real cost is to us, in an economic sense, in an environmental sense and in a health sense. That's what we should be looking at on each and every piece of legislation that we deal with here, and in particular when we're dealing with environmental legislation.

This government has failed to do that in the past. They failed to do that on the deposit return. They failed to do that in terms of the continued encouragement by them to use corn for the production of ethanol. We have to do that so that we don't make the same kinds of mistakes as they have on the corn-for-ethanol environmental argument that they have supported in the past four or five years they've been in power.

Let's do it right this time. If we have to ban it for everybody, we'll ban it for everybody. Let's get the facts in front of us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the opportunity. This has been an issue that I've followed for quite a while, so I've got a little bit of research—actually, a fairly in-depth amount of research—on this very interesting topic.

I'll start off by saying, "Sorry, Mom." Mom may not like what we're going to say, but we're going to stick to it anyway.

One of the things I try to do when I'm making a decision is always to look to the future through the eyes of the children of today. When the experts of today are telling us what realistically are going to be the challenges for tomorrow, I don't think there's any conclusive evidence on either side of this issue. I think the real issue is, do we take a chance and decide what is going to be in the best interests of the kids in the future? That's something we all have to stay in here and decide.

We sit there and we herbicide, we insecticide, we pasteurize, we purify and then we fertilize to get that monoculture that we have on our lawns. It's just so pristine, but then look what happens. Individuals are aerating lawns. I want to make a recommendation. Go and buy several dozen worms and let them do the job. They'll be able to aerate your lawn for you. You won't be pasteurizing, purifying, and then wondering what the impact is going to be in the future.

I know that locally, in the city, there have been some huge concerns. It goes quite in depth. It's a lot more than this, if you look at the research. The research I'm going to bring forward, if I get an opportunity to talk about it, will discuss the impact of pesticides that are used in preservatives for wood and those aspects. I look around at our school boards locally, at least in my riding in Oshawa and the municipality. They've torn down those playgrounds because there have been trace chemicals found in the preservatives or the pesticides in the wood, in the sand.

You get some two-, three-year-old kids or one-year-old kids, and the first thing they do is put things in the mouth because that's how they experience. It's one of the first senses they have, for those who don't recall what it's like to have kids. One of the key senses that kids have is their mouth, their tongue, and they put stuff in. Lo and behold, kids were putting sand in their mouth, same as normal, and it had all these pesticides in it. So the city and the board got rid of all those.

I want to emphasize that this bill needs to go to committee. The government has moved a little bit forward, and whether or not my colleagues are correct in moving forward in a political football area, I think there are some key things that need to be addressed. I don't think all the answers are there, and I'm going to show you why, and those organizations that tell you all those answers aren't out there.

As a matter of fact, I will be supporting the legislation. I'm not going to sit on the fence. I'm not going to tell you it's right or it's wrong. You're going to go to committee, you're going to open this bailiwick, so to speak. You want to address all the issues.

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You talk about the forestry issue. As I mentioned earlier in a two-minute hit, I spoke about the fact that a lot of the moose hunters and individuals concerned with moose and other game species in northern Ontario are very concerned with the forestry practices. Having had the privilege and honour of being a minister in the past, I'm certainly well versed in the fact that every year moose hunters come back and see how they've gone in and sprayed the forest—much like Atrazine does for corn, as Mr. Murdoch would know very well in his riding—to make sure that that single species of the coniferous forest grows and gets an opportunity. The half-life of the chemicals used there is very short, so those species would only lose about two years of food. For moose—you come into this area and cut down the trees, you then spray it, and it only allows the coniferous forest to grow, along with killing all the other forest and foliage in that area. What that does is, there's no food for moose. As a matter of fact, guess what? There's no food

for woodcock living in that area. There's no food for any other small game species and all the predator species that prey on those, whether they're coyotes, foxes, wolves, bears, whatever the case may be.

So when you're going to committee, I certainly hope you take into perspective that these individuals are impacted, and those discussions need to be opened as well, because you've opened that discussion, quite frankly, with this debate.

Some of the other things I want to talk about are that if you want to talk about these things, why not move forward—and the Minister of Natural Resources should move forward—with a study on robins? You ask, why would we be studying robins? Well, guess what robins feed on? Worms. What you need is an area where a municipality has gone forward and banned the use of chemicals, and one that has not banned them, and find out the impact on robins. You'll pick up a greater understanding of the chemical toxicology inside those species because they're directly feeding on the species that live in those areas that are either sprayed or not sprayed.

Some of the studies that I'm going to mention here—the Ontario College of Family Physicians study is the study I'll be quoting. They go into great detail and talk about the fact that some of these chemicals can build up over a period of time in the soil and about what the impact is there. We need to look at that. Those are some of the areas that may be beneficial in the study that will help determine whether it's going to be impacted or not. Robins are the perfect example.

Some of the other things: I know that the service providers—and I agree with my colleague who spoke just prior to me. If you're going to ban it, ban it openly. You can't have one group say yes and one group say no. That's sitting on the fence. Let's be realistic. If you're going to ban it, ban it for all and get rid of it. Don't be saying, "You can do this, but you can't because you're in this other group." It's only fair. What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

Quite frankly, some of those service providers I have some strong concerns with. The last time something similar to this bill came into the Legislature—as a cabinet minister, when I had that privilege and honour—I voted in favour of allowing municipalities the authority to decide whether they wanted to ban it or not. I would hope, like some members who are in the room now—I got all the nasty letters from all those service providers out there who were targeting me in the next election. They were going to do everything in their power to get rid of me because it was disgusting. My response to that was, "Great. I've got these reports that I'd love to send out to those individuals."

Every time I see one of those signs on a lawn out there that says, "Caution. Watch out for your kids and your pets"—keep them off because they've sprayed the lawn. What is that about? Why are they putting these up if there's no problem? We've got the studies and the tests, yet you still have to put up these signs to identify that it's been sprayed. Quite frankly, when we take the dog for a walk, we certainly pull him off the lawns that may be close to the road that may have been sprayed those days.

Some of the other areas: I'm very concerned about the no-spray times. I'm sure most people are not aware that there are certain times, because the wind factor is so high, that you're not supposed to be spraying. Just last week, there was a no-spray time, and guess who was out spraying the neighbour's lawn? It was all over the entire neighbourhood. You couldn't walk within two blocks without knowing which house was sprayed and which wasn't, because those companies were spraying when they shouldn't have been. Part of that is enforcement, and we need to make sure that the enforcement aspect is taken care of.

Not only that, but I'm quite opposed to these package deals that they sell. This may be quite a surprise, but I've done a bit of research on this, as I hope I'm emphasizing in this: When you buy one of these package deals, you're getting three sprays, whether you need them or not. If all those dandelions are gone, they're still coming to spray because you paid for it. Get rid of those package deals and maybe it'll be a lot better in the interests of the public at large and we wouldn't be having this debate today.

One of the other areas that I have some strong concern about is renewal contracts. Lo and behold, I have an annual time where people contact me because they sign a contract for one year. Who shows up the next year with no contract and just starts working on the lawn whether I like it or not? As a matter of fact, some of those individuals don't even live in those households anymore. That doesn't go over well. I realize we can't paint all those individuals with the same brush, but it needs to be addressed, and hopefully through the committee process—some of these things, whether it's through regulation or legislation.

Back to what I was talking about on some of these studies: I'm going to quote here from Pesticides and Human Health, the Environmental Health Committee Newsletter for Family Physicians. This is the Ontario College of Family Physicians, and it specifically states:

"The amounts and variety of pesticides now used are far greater than in any other time in history.

"Both quantitative and qualitative differences in toxicity of pesticides exist between children and adults. Infants and children may develop toxic outcomes from smaller quantities due to different metabolic rates, greater absorptive areas [and] diets more concentrated with certain foods high in pesticides, but they may also have outcomes such as neurological, behavioural, endocrinological and oncological that are not seen in adults due to critical windows of exposure ... during certain growth phases."

The studies go on, and I'm not going to have the time to go into the details. There are about 200 pages here, another 170 pages there, another 55 pages here, and I ran up, because of the way the debate was going, to try and bring some of this down to bring it out.

But I would advise those members to take a look at some of the research studies done by the Ontario College of Family Physicians. It goes on to state:

"Current regulatory systems look only at the average exposure of the entire population. As a consequence, variations in dietary exposure to pesticides and health risks related to age and to other factors such as geographic region and ethnicity are not addressed.

"Diet is an important source of exposure to pesticides" as well.

All these factors are not taken in. There is nothing here.

I'll go to another study, which is through another section on the Relationship Between Children's Health and Environmental Contaminants. It's very specific:

"There is a significant need for greater education of the public, health professionals and policymakers as to the avoidable, preventable nature of environmental disease in children." This goes on and specifically states:

"Children's health problems that are or may be related to environmental contaminants are on the rise in Canada and other industrialized countries. These include health conditions such as asthma"—I'm sure all have heard about the number of cases of kids with asthma going up. When I was growing up, we hardly ever saw it; maybe one or two. The percentage was so small, it was less than 1% in a school. Now look at what's taking place.

Interjection.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Yes. The member mentions allergies as another one.

"These include health conditions such as asthma, childhood cancers, learning disabilities...." I'm going to get this wrong, because it's changed. It used to be ADD and all the other aspects that come forward. We don't know and don't have the answers. This study specifically says:

"In most of the studies, the outcome was more accurately assessed than was the exposure. Often there was a medical record check or the study utilized a population-based registry."

What that is saying is that they knew the outcome, but they don't actually have the amount of exposure to determine if that's one of the key factors. I think what needs to take place very specifically with this legislation is that there need to be more studies done. There are a lot of factors that go out there, whether it's airborne pollutants or the cars we drive. When you're getting into a new vehicle—I remember in the forest industry they were getting certifications, which meant they had a certain contaminant less, or eliminated from the process, in pressure-treated wood. When you go in and meet these individuals—there was 100 times more in a brand new vehicle, so they were explaining to me. I didn't talk with the auto sector on that very specific issue, but I think the answer is that we don't have all the answers. I think what we as legislators have to do is look to the future.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: We shouldn't be passing a law.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound says, "We shouldn't be passing it." I think we should be going to committee and have full-blown committee hearings so we can get some in-depth research and opportunities to come forward to address this issue.

I've been watching it for a considerable amount of time to try and make that personal decision on: What do I do? I don't spray the lawn. I don't do those sorts of things. I'm out there with a weed puller, pulling weeds, and when the neighbours aren't looking, I'm slipping next door and grabbing theirs so they're not phoning the spray company to kill all the dandelions on their lawn, because we're all directly affected.

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I think some of the key things here are that all the answers aren't out there. If you want to open the bailiwick of this debate, let's make sure that we get all the input. Some of the other areas that I mentioned—and these studies go on to talk about the fact that there is a considerable amount in Canada.

Another study here, Regulating Pesticides to Protect Children's Health, specifically states in section 9.1.2, Children: Greater Exposure and Potential for Serious Health Effects:

"In Canada, most pesticides are commonly applied in agriculture and by the forestry industry. However, they are also frequently used in the household setting, both indoors and outdoors. Common household pesticide applications target garden weeds, insect infestations ... fleas on pets, and lice, scabies, bugs and bacteria on people."

What does that say about all those pet collars out there? We've got the new one this year, the Hot Spot, that you can pick up, where you just put the spot on the dog, and guess what? All fleas and ticks jump off the dog, jump ship real quick. What is the impact on society from there? Ever smell a flea collar? I don't know if you have a pet, but we used to have flea collars all the time and used to wonder what the impact was on the dog with flea collars and the use of those to kill all those fleas, as the fleas travel up and down the collar. We don't have all those answers.

Interjection.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Oh, he says I'm right out of the city. No—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Ouellette, one second. It's starting so that I hear the banter above the debate. I really would appreciate it if we—we only have a few minutes to go, so please.

Member for Oshawa, you have the floor.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I am sure that the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound would like an opportunity to bring his perspective forward, as I have here.

"Many pesticide uses can therefore bring people into contact with these chemicals through their living environment and via occupational exposure. Spraying ... means wide, airborne dispersal of pesticide, which allows for an effective route of exposure to humans via inhalation, ingestion or skin absorption."

We're living in an environment where we're constantly putting on—it drives me crazy to put on the sunscreen stuff. Like I said in debate before, and I have no problem saying again, 20 or 25 years from now we're going to find out, "Oh, we shouldn't have had that chemical in there because it's going to cause cancer or some liver disease or kidney disease for kids and they're going to be exposed and deal with it later." As I started off my comments, the experts of today are the challenges for the future. That will be one of the things.

Some of those other things: What happens with all those skin absorptions and how does it take place? We talk about the use of flea collars and other aspects and how that impacts society. It's not a single issue. I think what's taking place is that the current government has moved forward and said, "We're going to address this issue and we're going to fix it for all, because this is going to take care of it." No. At the end of the day, I'll tell you right now that Legislatures in future generations sitting in this chamber will be debating other aspects that should be removed. This may be one of the other aspects, whether it's flea collars or whether it's other things. But the thing here is that we need to make sure we've got the best and the most informed aspect to come forward in making these decisions. I think the committee process will do that.

If you want to talk about all these things, we need to open up all the discussion for the whole thing and discuss the entire impact throughout the province of Ontario.

I think, with that, I've gone through most of the issues that I wanted to bring forward on it.

Interjection.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: No, no, no. That's okay. We will do the hits and I'll get the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to stand up and give his opinion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I must say that I felt that the speech from my colleague the member from Oshawa was very informative, very compelling, and I think he articulated his position very well on why he generally supports this important piece of legislation, Bill 64, the Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act.

I just want to make note here that on April 28, my federal colleague the Honourable John Baird released this report called It's All About The Water: Report of the Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway, which runs through my riding of Peterborough.

Particularly, chapter 5 is very important. All members in this House should take the opportunity to read this very comprehensive report. Chapter 5 is entitled Ensuring the Future of Our Water, and on page 24, it says: "Many citizens with whom we spoke are both knowledgeable and concerned about water issues" in the Trent-Severn watershed. "They reminded us that the quality of the water is dependent on what happens on the land—poor land management means poor water. They spoke to us about wetland and habitat destruction, leaking septic systems, herbicide and pesticide use, invasive species" and a whole range of other things that are directly impacting our water quality.

I know from my experience that the city of Peterborough has brought in one of the leading pesticide bylaws throughout Ontario. They did it after they compiled an extensive listing of scientific evidence before they moved forward to bring that local city bylaw into effect. They were concerned about water quality. They were concerned about what pesticides and exposure to them could do to young children. There are many alternative ways we can do it. In fact, I started with my son, Braden. On Sunday, I promised him five cents for every dandelion he took out of our lawn at home. He came to me yesterday and got 20 bucks from Dad.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I'm glad to have a few minutes to speak on what the last speaker had to say. I don't agree with him, but that's okay. That's what we're here for, and it's nice that we can disagree on certain things. But he contradicts himself when he says that we should know all this information. Well, yes, we should, before we bring this bill. How can we vote for a bill that we don't have the information on? He has a lot more faith in the system, that we're going to go out and have people tell us about it. I don't have a lot of faith that this government across the way will listen to anybody. That's the problem. If I had some faith in them over there, that might work, but they haven't listened to anybody since they got elected four years ago, and that's the trouble. They bring in a bill like this, when they don't have a clue what they're talking about, and try to force it through.

The member from Mississippi Mills mentioned that it's okay for the farmer and it's okay for the guy on the golf course but it's not okay for those trained people who do this. That shows you right away that they're not listening. They're just bringing in something that supposedly 70% of the people agree with. Well, if they know what it's all about, they may not agree with it.

I'm a little disappointed that the last speaker went on saying, "I can support this bill." They don't know what they're talking about. I'm not quite sure where he's coming from on that avenue, because obviously they don't know what they're talking about over there. It's nice to see that they're listening now and doing a bit of cackling over there, because unfortunately they didn't listen to the last speaker; they talked all the way through it. Maybe if they had done that, they might have learned something and they might vote against the bill too. I think before you bring in a bill in this House, you should do your research first, not as you're bringing in the bill. You need to know what you are talking about before you bring in a bill. Unfortunately, this is happening too much here. The government of the day is bringing in bills when they absolutely don't know what they're talking about.

Mr. Mike Colle: I just wanted to say that the member from Oshawa demonstrates that he has done a lot of reading. He is an avid outdoorsman who really respects Ontario's outdoors. He proved that when he was in government, on the other side, and he's saying it now. He is not a person who is taking this lightly, and he is

basically saying the time has come for us to take a real hard look at this indiscriminate use of pesticides for cosmetic uses. What is the consequence?

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is saying, "Well, we have to do all this other research." I'd rather say, "Put a hold on this and make sure that this indiscriminate use of these cosmetic pesticides stops."

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: No, no, put a hold on the use of these chemicals. You're saying, "I want to live in a chemical world." People are saying, "The use of chemicals can harm our fish, can harm our plants, can harm our children." I think the general consensus of the Ontario Medical Association, the Ontario Cancer Society—they are saying that. So the government is reacting to what the doctors are saying.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: But I'm listening to what the doctors, the cancer society, are saying. I agree with the member from Oshawa, who is saying, "We owe it to the people of Ontario to put a hold on this indiscriminate use of these chemicals" because the chances are quite high that they're harming us and they're going to harm our children and they're going to harm our water and our land, which we treasure so much in Ontario. That's all he is saying, and I agree with him. He is saying, "Stop the chemical use when you don't have to use the chemicals. You don't have to have the chemicals poured on your front lawn every day."

Mr. Dave Levac: I just wanted to make a couple of comments. The member from Oshawa, whom I've gotten to know over the years, always comes prepared and always has an opinion that's based on—and I do agree with him, and he has said it several times in the House before—the generation in front. I believe he's making those comments based on concern not for today but for the next generation and to ensure that we're doing the right thing for them. So I appreciate that sentiment, and I know he has said that several times in the past, as have I and many members in this House. That's the first point I want to agree with him on, and I want to thank him for making sure he stays true to that.

The other part that we seem to be getting stuck on is the farmer application versus the weed-man application or the customer applicators who buy the products themselves at a store. The difference between the three is that the farmer has a licence. He is certified. That farmer has certification and training on how to apply, what to apply and when to apply it. The persons who go to the store on their own, who take pride in the do-it-yourself situation, see commercials—and I've seen these—where, in a cartoon-like way, you spray the stuff and all of a sudden the weed is gone. They take a look at this, and the weed is not gone, and they say, "Well, I guess maybe I didn't apply enough," or "Maybe I should apply an extra dosage to the crack in the driveway because if I do it this way, I can get rid of it quicker." Those are the types of applicators that everyone should be concerned about, and we should be making sure that we don't get into the game where we sit back and say that those who are the professional people who apply it, who have licences and are charged with making sure they take care of our safety, are compared to those other ones.

In terms of the applicators, the other alternatives are already out there. We're now seeing those companies making the conversion on their own. So they are moving faster than we are in this House. So let's support the bill and get going.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Oshawa, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: There are a number of things here. First of all, the companies out there are supposed to be licensed and be professionals in the same fashion as farmers. This is correct. What's going to happen to a lot of other areas that need to be addressed as well? For example, log-home builders spray their logs to stop a fungus, a breakdown or blackening of the logs to make sure that log homes are consistent. What's going to happen with those? Those individuals, to my knowledge, are not licensed. How is it going to affect them? That's only one blink of some of the impact that will take place. Quite frankly, the committee, I would hope, is going to have the opportunity to address those issues. Also, I will be contacting those individuals and saying, "If you give a damn"—oh, sorry—"If you give a water-retaining device regarding this issue, then you should be there at committee to talk about these issues."

Back to the issue of how I came to this decision: A lot of us in opposition sit back, and I've been watching this issue because, should we be given the privilege and honour to govern again, this would be one of the issues I would try to bring forward. I've been doing a research-based application on that sense, so that if we, the next time around—because you know what everybody says, "We're going to be in, and you're going to be out," and on and on. Who knows? I want to be ready for it. So I have been doing a considerable amount of research to try to plan for that, because you don't just show up and say, "Okay, we've got a good idea, and we're going to take care of that problem right away." No. We need some background. As it stands right now, I am moving forward and supporting this to get it to committee to allow those other areas to further my research, to make sure it's right, to give those people an opportunity to have some impact and bring it forward. The research, as it indicates to me right now, is that it's in the best interests, from what I can see—my personal sense is, as I said when I started this, to look to the future through the eyes of the children of today, and that's what I did when I made this process, and that was the determining factor in deciding that that's the way I'm going to vote.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 5:45 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 of the clock, Tuesday, May 13.

The House adjourned at 1744.

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Tuesday 13 May 2008

Mardi 13 mai 2008

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 13 May 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 13 mai 2008

The House met at 0900.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE

Mr. Bryant, on behalf of Ms. Best, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 69, An Act to protect children from second-hand tobacco smoke in motor vehicles by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act / Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée pour protéger les enfants contre le tabagisme passif dans les véhicules automobiles.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: Good morning, and thank you very much. It's my pleasure to be here this morning, and I'm pleased to share my time with my esteemed colleague the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, my parliamentary assistant, Dr. Helena Jaczek.

I would like to begin by acknowledging our colleague David Orazietti. He is not just a great representative for his constituents in Sault Ste. Marie, but for children and all Ontarians. Mr. Orazietti's dedication and drive has brought us to this debate on Bill 69, an act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

The primary objective of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act has always been to protect children from second-hand smoke in enclosed public spaces and workplaces. This amendment would extend province-wide protection to children in motor vehicles. It is an important part of my mandate to lead our government's smoke-free Ontario strategy. Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario. It kills 13,000 people every year in our province. Thanks to the hard work of this government, Ontario is recognized as having one of the most comprehensive tobacco control strategies in North America. Legislation is an integral part of this strategy. The proposed amendment that we are debating today builds on our commitment to a healthier, smoke-free Ontario. It is the next step in the direction of a healthier Ontario. Second-hand smoke in vehicles is particularly harmful, and even more so for our children.

Recent studies suggest that the concentrations of toxins in vehicles can be up to 27 times worse than in a smoker's home. The Ontario Medical Association found that children exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to suffer sudden infant death syndrome, acute respiratory infections, ear infections and asthma. The medical science is clear: Second-hand smoke is dangerous to our children's health. Our children are our most vulnerable citizens, yet a Health Canada study in 2005 estimated that 140,000 children in Ontario between the ages of 12 and 16 were exposed to second-hand smoke in vehicles during a one-month period.

As a government, we took note of the evidence. We listened to our stakeholders; we listened to Ontarians. What did they tell us? They told us that more needed to be done to protect our children from second-hand smoke when they are passengers in the confined space of a motor vehicle. As a government, we are very much aware that when acting in the public interest, public support must be irrefutable. In January of this year, a poll released by the Canadian Cancer Society showed that over 80% of Ontarians, including 66% of smokers in Ontario, support a ban on smoking in vehicles with children present. We are confident that the public is ready for this proposed ban to protect the health of our children. Our stakeholders are leading this momentum. In fact, some of Ontario's leaders further demonstrated their support for this proposed ban just two weeks ago in the Legislature upon the first reading of this proposed legislation. They included representatives from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, Ontario Lung Association, Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco, Ontario Public Health Association, and the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. Peter Goodhand, of the Canadian Cancer Society, has said: "Children don't have a choice when it comes to exposure to second-hand smoke while travelling in a vehicle. We congratulate the Ontario government for taking this step to protect our children's health. We urge the government to pass and implement this legislation as quickly as possible."

Given the large number of Ontarians who stand in support of this proposed ban, we are expecting that this proposed legislation will have significant voluntary compliance. Additionally, if we are successful in passing this bill, my ministry plans to deliver a multi-layered public education campaign with our partners, including public health departments across the province.

As with any legislation, there are those among us who will make enforcement necessary. Thus, the proposal includes a partnership with police services across the province to enforce the legislation, if passed. But in addition to public education and legislation, we are lev-

eraging all the components of the smoke-free Ontario strategy. For example, the ministry supports an extensive network of young people who have been nurtured under the smoke-free Ontario strategy to convince their peers that smoking is indeed a deadly choice. T-dot is a precious resource. It stands for Tobacco Don't Own Toronto, a working group of Toronto's Youth Alliance Action, and believe me when I say they are a force of young people to be reckoned with. Earlier this year, I had the great pleasure of meeting with students at Sir Wilfrid Laurier Collegiate Institute in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood with the youth action alliance, and I was thrilled by the energy and enthusiasm of these young people. I was so impressed by their courage to come forward as role models among their peers. Those young people are making the right choice.

0910

We want to give young children a voice from the back seats of cars. We want to ensure that their voices are heard and that we protect their right to a healthy start, a smoke-free life. The Ministry of Health Promotion is committed to this endeavour for the sake of our children. The Premier and our government are committed to this; our partners are committed to this. I appeal to all Ontarians to commit to a smoke-free Ontario and smoke-free vehicles for the sake of our children. The medical science is clear: Second-hand smoke is indeed dangerous to our children's health. As with seat belt legislation, we owe it to our children to keep them safe and healthy.

At the time when David Orazietti introduced his bill, we said we wanted to hear from Ontarians. Well, the people of Ontario have spoken, and we have listened. Now we're taking action.

The people of Ontario are ready for legislation to protect our children from exposure to second-hand smoke in motor vehicles. This proposed legislation is about the safety and well-being of our children. It is about making a healthier Ontario. It is also about a wealthier Ontario. The cost to our health care system for tobacco-related illnesses is $1.7 billion annually.

With the introduction of this bill, and now with this second reading, I urge the members opposite to work with us to pass this legislation for the health of our children. Your vote in favour of this bill to protect our children from second-hand smoke in motor vehicles is giving a voice to our most vulnerable citizens. This is a voice to our most precious resource: our children, our future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I recognize the member for York South–Weston.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Oak Ridges–Markham.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a great pleasure to rise in support of our Minister of Health Promotion and Bill 69, An Act to protect children from second-hand tobacco smoke in motor vehicles by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

This is another step in the war against tobacco use. It's a war that was heralded, in the words of King James I of England, several centuries ago, in 1604. He wrote that tobacco use is "a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lung...."

On a more scientific basis, in 1964, the call to arms came from the US Surgeon General, Dr. Everett Koop, with his landmark study relating smoking to a number of health hazards, particularly to lung cancer. In fact, Dr. Koop wrote another article saying he wished for "a smoke-free society by the year 2000."

Well, we're not there yet, but we're making excellent progress. When I first graduated from medicine in 1973 from the University of Toronto, the fight against tobacco use was on a patient-by-patient basis. When we came across someone who smoked, we certainly counselled them to quit. I remember well seeing my first patient, a woman in her 60s with lung cancer, and realizing that this preventable disease, for the very most part, would have been prevented had she either quit smoking or never started.

Over the next decade or so, there was a gradual realization that there was a need for large-scale public education campaigns; in other words, a social marketing approach. That approach was very much spearheaded by a former chief medical officer of health for this province, Dr. Richard Schabas. When I arrived at the regional municipality of York in 1988, as the new medical officer of health, I found that members of regional council actually smoked throughout meetings of the health and social services committee. It took a couple of months to convince them that perhaps this was not the best message to their constituents. In fact, the ashtrays were removed and there was no longer smoking in regional council.

Throughout the 1990s, most medical officers of health in this province spent a great deal of time trying to convince municipalities to pass bylaws to ensure that public places were smoke-free. In the region of York, with nine area municipalities, we ended up with a patchwork of bylaws. They differed in some respects. It took us some six years, in fact, to pass a bylaw that covered the whole region; in other words, to level the playing field. It was a very important further step that this government took with passing the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, which levelled the playing field across the province.

The McGuinty government has made significant progress in this war against tobacco. We are a government that likes to measure things and show progress and show some results. In 2003, the government committed to reducing tobacco consumption by 20%. In fact, we far surpassed that goal: The reduction is over 30%. This is an incredible 4.6 billion fewer cigarettes smoked. With our Smoke-Free Ontario Act, we do have 99% compliance with smoke-free bars and restaurants.

I'd like to commend the member for Sault Ste. Marie for leading the charge in terms of smoking in cars where children are present. His private member's bill, Bill 11, was commended at the time by the Ontario Medical Association, and also by Vance Blackmore, president of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, who said, in regard to that private member's bill, "The passage of

the Smoke-Free Ontario Act was a clear message that the government understood the significant dangers of second-hand smoke and is committed to minimizing involuntary exposure to it. We believe that this bill is a worthy amendment to the act, as it will protect children from involuntary exposure to it while in any vehicle."

Recently, in regard to this bill, Bill 69, Dr. Charles Gardner, chair of the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health, said, "As a health practitioner, medical officer of health and CEO of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, as chair of the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health and as a parent, I applaud the Ontario government for bringing forward this legislation, which will safeguard the health of Ontario's children in the Simcoe Muskoka district and throughout Ontario."

In fact, the Ministry of Health Promotion has heard from more than 24 Ontario municipalities who have either written or called for a ban on smoking in cars with children present. I'm particularly pleased that this includes the regional municipality of York, as well as such diverse municipalities as the town of Tecumseh, the city of Kenora, the township of Terrace Bay, Peterborough and Toronto, just to name a few.

As the minister has stated, public education is the cornerstone of our war against tobacco. We anticipate that voluntary compliance will, in fact, be the majority of situations. However, even this legislative debate will bring greater awareness and education to the citizens of Ontario. As the minister has stated, if this bill is passed, the Ministry of Health Promotion plans to deliver a multilayered health public education campaign with smoke-free Ontario partners across the province that will reach out to people wherever they think about their vehicles and their children. With our partners the public health units, this concept will be introduced in prenatal classes, in youth alliances, youth advisory groups and the various high schools that have wellness councils. There will be no lost opportunity to introduce the importance of this particular act. We know that in a recent poll by the Canadian Cancer Society, over 80% of Ontarians, including smokers themselves, are very supportive of this legislation.

0920

One of the areas that is of particular importance is to continue to invest in cessation programs to help smokers quit. I don't think it's really appreciated just how addictive nicotine actually is. I know that in the case of my own father, at the age of 87, as a lifelong smoker, unfortunately hospitalized, he understood, of course, that he wasn't going to be able to smoke in the hospital. But he asked that a cigar be brought to him so he could sniff it occasionally. That's how addictive tobacco actually is.

So we have invested in, as an example, the STOP program, the Smoking Treatment for Ontario Patients study, through the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and it's designed to examine and support best practices to quit. The focus is on nicotine replacement therapies and counselling to find what the most effective mechanism actually is. In the first two years of the study, we've reached more than 38,000 smokers. In January, the Minister of Health Promotion announced that our government will be providing an additional $2 million to support an additional 15,000 more smokers to participate in this study. Our goal, in fact, is to reach 175,000 Ontario smokers through this particular initiative.

As Minister Best has said, this is all about the health, safety and well-being of our children. In the words of the Ontario Lung Association, this is about "giving a voice to the back seat." This is the next step in a healthier smoke-free Ontario. I urge all members of this House to support this legislation.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the minister's speech on Bill 69, An Act to protect children from second-hand tobacco smoke in motor vehicles by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, and also the speech from the member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

As the member from Oak Ridges–Markham said, 80% of the population supports this move to ban smoking in cars, and I think that sort of demonstrates the way this government comes up with legislation. I think they poll people, and then, based on what's popular, introduce legislation. Certainly, I support this legislation; however, it's something we shouldn't need. We shouldn't need to legislate common sense, and certainly it's common sense that you don't smoke in a vehicle with your children. I think the great majority of people who are parents don't smoke in cars, and those who do are probably not likely to worry that there's a law about whether you can or cannot smoke in your car. As with a lot of the legislation this government is introducing, I think this is probably more about public relations.

I think we should be concentrating on education. Anything we can do to discourage people from smoking is a good thing, so we should look at educating particularly our young people so they don't become addicted to the habit of smoking.

I know that smoking is a habit that is probably as addictive as any and a very difficult one to break. My brother started smoking when he was a farmer, many years ago—roll-your-own cigarettes with the farmer he was learning to farm with. It took him about 30 years to quit, but he finally quit, and I think he feels a lot better because of it. I know it's very difficult for a lot of people to quit. I think the government should concentrate on more education so that people don't start this bad habit.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I would like to make a few comments following the Minister of Health Promotion, as well as the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, and maybe even some of the comments made by the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

As was mentioned by the minister, there is strong support for this bill. Bill 69, the Smoke-Free Ontario Amendment Act, is trying to help protect people from second-hand smoke, especially children. Among New Democrats, there is historic support for health promotion and children's well-being, so this is certainly in line with our party's philosophy. There is widespread support for

the bill by partners, health organizations and agencies, as you mentioned: the Ontario Medical Association, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, the Ontario Public Health Association, the Ontario Lung Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, public health units, the Non-Smokers' Rights Association—and the list goes on. The list goes on because this bill is a tiny, weeny, little step toward protecting people from second-hand smoke.

We have an opportunity, as the member from Oak Ridges–Markham mentioned, to do a whole lot more through educational programs and health promotion programs. Unfortunately, none of this is in the bill as we see it. They are part of other programs yet to come, yet to be funded, yet to arrive. The Minister of Health Promotion focused on, I think she called it, "a mighty force to be reckoned with" of a youth group that is really much in support. I will talk further about the importance of getting youth 16 to 19 involved.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Let me start by saying in regard to the comments from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, this is much more than wetting your finger and sticking it up in the air and testing the winds of public opinion. This is indeed a very good, very strong piece of public policy that we're bringing forward. It's a bit disturbing to see someone make such light of it. I want to congratulate the Minister of Health Promotion for bringing it forward and also, of course, our colleague from Sault Ste. Marie, David Orazietti, who began this some time ago with his private member's bill.

I can remember clearly my time on municipal council back in Thunder Bay when, as a municipality, we began a series of consultations within our community about bringing in a smoke-free bylaw, the gold standard bylaw back in 2000 or 2001—I forget exactly what year it was. We became one of the first municipalities in the province, and of course there are many more that have done it before and since, who brought in legislation and bylaws around exactly this kind of thing. The support for this is large. It's about protecting people who can't protect themselves. I would maybe make a bit of a parallel with our pesticide act that we just brought in. It's centred on children.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Mauro: There is a groundswell of public support for this stuff, about protecting people who can't protect themselves. There are still people out there who don't think second-hand smoke is bad for you. To suggest that we can just do some education and forget about it—I think this is a great idea that has great support.

I can remember, after we passed our bylaw in the city of Thunder Bay, touring northern Ontario and going into communities that did not have their own municipal bylaws yet around second-hand smoke and smoking in public places. I can remember going into the establishments and actually feeling like I'd gone back a bit in time, that there were still communities who had not reacted to this. I'm happy that we brought in the broader Smoke-Free Ontario Act. I'm happy that we're bringing in this piece of legislation, that protects young children. I congratulate the minister on the legislation. We're looking forward to all-party support on this particular bill.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to spend two minutes and comment on this, what I think is a very good piece of legislation. I certainly could have used it when I was growing up. Both of my parents smoked in the car, God love them. I know my mother is probably watching right now. But it wasn't their fault; that was what people did in those days.

Mr. Toby Barrett: You were smoking too.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I was smoking indirectly, I guess.

In addition to this legislation—I did note that the minister said that Ontario was the lead in all this, but according to the notes that I've been provided, Nova Scotia, the Yukon and British Columbia have already moved forward with similar legislation. So we're actually leading from the back of the pack. But I do congratulate the minister for bringing it forward. It's overdue.

I, by coincidence I guess, last night was pulling into the underground garage at my apartment here in Toronto, and as I was going down the ramp, coming up the ramp was a fellow with two kids strapped in kids' seats in the back seat—he did that right—but he had a cigarette hanging out of his mouth as he was pushing the button to get out of the garage. I thought, "Holy mackerel." In this day and age, you don't see that too often. So I think the legislation's fine.

0930

You're going to have to do an advertising campaign, though, or a public awareness campaign. I wouldn't spend a lot of money on it, but I would maybe put up a few signs in some of these underground garages, reminding people as they're getting into their car not only to strap their children in properly, but not to smoke. Because the poor kid—it's protection of the innocent. That's Parliament's biggest responsibility in life, in my opinion: to protect the innocent and protect those who cannot protect themselves. This legislation does that. I'm also pleased to see that it'll be enforced by police officers and not just left up to the smoking police, as I used to call them when I was Minister of Health.

Again, congratulations to the minister. Good luck with it. I hope it has a real effect on public health in the province, and I'm sure we all agree with that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments, I believe. I'll return to one of the government members for two minutes in reply. The Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I would like to thank all the members who spoke today in support of this proposed legislation. I would also, again, like to thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie for his bill. Also, I would like to thank my colleague the member for Oak Ridges–Markham for her input today, and all the members who have had input with respect to this piece of proposed legislation as we move forward.

I also would like to say that this is a very important day for our children, the children of Ontario, in terms of

protecting their health. As we heard from the member opposite from Simcoe–Grey, who stated that he wishes this bill was in place when he was a child because both his parents smoked, this is a voice for those who don't have a voice, the children who sit in the backseats of cars.

Certainly, we intend to have a public education strategy, which is a key component of this proposed legislation, if it is indeed passed. I want to say that this has truly been a tremendous experience, listening to the voices of the people of Ontario and taking up the position that they asked us to take in moving forward. I would commend everyone—including all of our stakeholders—who has been involved with us right from the beginning. I want to take this time to ask the members and everyone to continue to support this legislation by talking to people and speaking out whenever they can in enforcement of this particular bill, if passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to join in the debate this morning on behalf of the official opposition in respect to Bill 69, An Act to protect children from second-hand tobacco smoke in motor vehicles by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

You notice that right there in the title of the bill, it actually begins with "An Act to protect children." I think that all of us—as I've stated many, many times in the Legislature, as have the opposition members—believe very strongly in the protection of our vulnerable members in society, especially in respect to the protection of children. They certainly are the future of our province here in Ontario.

It would be challenging, I think, for anyone to be against this bill. I'm the critic for the Ministry of Health Promotion, and the title of the ministry itself is health promotion. It promotes health and the safety of Ontarians. I'm sure the Liberals across the way focus that promotion of health and safety to include all Ontarians. We want to protect our children—there's no question, that's not the issue—wherever they are in the province of Ontario and whatever circumstance they are in.

Certainly, this minister wants to be seen and perceived as doing the right thing—protecting children. So being perceived to do the right thing includes this introduction. It's been reintroduced a few times in the Legislature and in the press. It is with that in mind that I look forward to the debate on the merits of the bill and to put forward some of my thoughts on what can be done with this legislation.

There is a bit of history to this bill that we see before us today. It was introduced previously by the member for Sault Ste. Marie, and the minister was very good in mentioning in the comments that it was introduced as private member's legislation before by that member for Sault Ste. Marie. Interestingly, when it was introduced, the Premier himself denounced what the Minister of Health Promotion has brought forward in Bill 69. He used some carefully crafted language when the private member's bill was introduced and I think he said that it's a slippery slope.

What is concerning is that in the same article the Minister of Health Promotion said she is content to debate a ban at the end of the year, which would have been the end of this year that we're in, 2008. So this is all after the private member's bill was introduced by the member for Sault Ste. Marie. We have the Premier saying, "Caution. I don't know for sure what to do yet," the Minister of Health Promotion saying maybe at the end of this year we'd be doing that. I trust that the minister is sincere in doing what she says, in bringing forward this legislation. Certainly, we'll question the reason the legislation all of a sudden became a priority.

I want to quote from the December 2007 Kingston Whig-Standard: Health Promotion Minister Margarett Best "was noncommittal about whether the province would support the latest proposal"; the Windsor Star, December 7: Margarett Best, Minister of Health Promotion, "shied away from saying whether she would support the bill." This is in relation to the private member's bill again, I say.

Maybe the direction hadn't been given by the Premier's office to point at what the Premier thought was a slippery slope at that point; he doesn't want his cabinet colleagues to disagree. Regardless of how you look at this, there are some interesting agreements or disagreements that have unfolded over the past several months with respect to the Liberals' position on this particular aspect of protecting children. But we are here debating it as legislation today, so we're happy to see that.

In my own riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, I've been pleased to work with my local health unit, the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit, in promoting awareness of the dangers to our children of both smoking and second-hand smoke. They did a great job of spearheading the petitions I've been reading in the Legislature. They got on board with one of the high schools in Lindsay, I. E. Weldon Secondary School. A very eager group of young ladies got many signatures on petitions. They came to my office and they had the press there—learning how to do politics and how to get legislation and changes moved forward into law. I said to them that we must follow through with this, so we're going to keep in touch with them as part of the education that started with petitions to change the legislation. They brought it to their MPP—myself—who brought petitions forward to the Legislature in support of the legislation. I think it's a great learning experience and education is a big component of this legislation, as I have discussed and will address later.

Interestingly enough, the local health unit is also currently involved in a campaign called CATCH, which is lobbying against contraband tobacco products, somewhat of a sensitive topic that we've been discussing in the Legislature over the past month or more. Certainly, it's been sensitive for the Minister of Health Promotion and the many ministries that are involved, but I'll defer those comments about that situation to a little later.

When the bill was first introduced by the member for Sault Ste. Marie, the health promotion minister, as I said, was content to wait till the end of the year. The local health unit that came to my office said, "Bring this on. Here are the petitions." At that point, I think there were over 1,000 petitions that we received from my riding with respect to this matter. I know that many of my colleagues in the Legislature have read similar petitions in that respect. I think that helped, and certainly some of the polling numbers, as my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka said, maybe changed that discussion so that we're not having it at the end of this year, we're having it now. It's kind of one of those conversions on the road to Damascus that seem to happen over there on the Liberal side of the House. They've seen the light. They're changing their ways, in this respect anyway, in their timelines.

I wanted to put some statistics on the record that give me concern and certainly give the Liberals, I'm sure, reason for bringing in this province-wide program to educate parents and others on the dangers of second-hand smoke and smoking in vehicles with children.

0940

My colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo, the health critic for the PC Party, brought forward a resolution directly addressing the need for such an education program in December of last year. It was, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should protect the children and youth of this province from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke in automobiles by immediately implementing an effective province-wide campaign to educate parents about the dangers of smoking in vehicles when a person who is less than 16 years of age is present." I say that the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, our health critic, had great foresight. She filed it on December 13, 2007.

Many of you in the Legislature know that I was a health professional, a registered nurse, for over 20 years. Many of you have children at home and you see that children breathe faster. There is a rapid rate of respiration compared to an adult. They breathe faster and therefore they absorb more of these harmful chemicals. They have much less capacity to withstand the effects of these harmful chemicals. They have higher rates of metabolism than adults do too. It's just part of growing. So the exposure to harmful chemicals increases significantly when they are subjected to smoke within a vehicle.

Every time a person breathes in second-hand smoke, whether a child or an adult, that person inhales over 100 harmful chemical agents. You look at the statistics out there and it's frightening. I've been in the nursing field, and I know many people are parents, but it still is a staggering statistic, that they're inhaling over 100 harmful chemical agents from second-hand smoke. There are a large number of risk factors that are increased by inhaling second-hand smoke that have negative effects on infants and children as well. I wanted to read some into the record:

"Every time a person breathes in second-hand smoke, he/she consumes over 100 harmful chemical agents—carcinogens and toxins. Involuntary smoking involves exposure to the same numerous carcinogens and toxic substances that are present in mainstream tobacco smoke. There are 69 identified carcinogens in tobacco smoke.

"Of the 69 cancer-causing chemical agents, 11 are human carcinogens, 7 are probably carcinogenic in humans, and 49 of animal carcinogens are possibly also carcinogenic to humans.

"Chemicals found in second-hand smoke include:"—besides what I just mentioned—"carbon monoxide (found in your car's exhaust); ammonia (found in window cleaners); cadmium (found in batteries); arsenic (found in rat poison." Fairly frightening.

"Cigarettes produce about 12 minutes of smoke—smokers inhale 30 seconds of the smoke, the rest of the smoke lingers in the air for non-smokers to inhale.

"There is a growing awareness that adult tobacco use is also a child health problem.

"Prenatal and postnatal exposure to SHS"—second-hand smoke—"has multiple significant negative effects on a child's health during both childhood and subsequent adulthood."

I know the member for Simcoe–Grey was mentioning about his parents smoking when he was younger. My parents did not smoke but some of my family members did. Their children just harassed them today, totally, about, "How could you smoke with us in the house, in the car, around us?" But at that point, it's education. They didn't realize what they were doing. Certainly no one did it intentionally, but it is quite frightening when you start to read the statistics, some of which I'm reading today.

"SHS is known to increase the risk of low birth weight; serve as a trigger for asthma symptoms and lower respiratory infections; associated with sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS); ear infections; increased risk for development of cancer and heart disease in adults; negative impact on behaviour, attention and cognition."

When they say, "Levels of SHS in homes can reach those found in bars," 30 years ago no one would have ever dreamed of the effects of second-hand smoke and the statistics that we have before us today.

"Exposure in vehicles"—which is the bill we're discussing here today—"is known to be especially potent because of the restricted space—exposure to SHS in a vehicle is 23 times more toxic than in a house.

"When specific cancer types are considered, it has been found that leukemia and lymphoma among adults are significantly related to exposure to maternal tobacco use before 10 years of age.

"A study in the New England Journal of Medicine concluded that approximately one out of every five instances of lung cancer in non-smokers could be attributed to childhood SHS smoke exposure."

After seeing all those statistics, I don't know how anyone can smoke out there anymore.

"The most frequently diagnosed cancer in Ontario is lung cancer—about 8,100 people will be diagnosed with lung cancer in 2008.

"Furthermore, blood carboxyhemoglobin levels of both the individual using tobacco and the individual exposed to SHS increase significantly after smoking has occurred—children have much higher respiratory rates and metabolism than adults...." It's a really serious problem. It impacts them twice as bad. We kind of got technical there, but basically you don't have as much oxygen-carrying capacity in your hemoglobin when you're smoking or have been exposed to second-hand smoke. So it's proven that children absorb the chemicals much faster than adults do, especially in enclosed areas like cars, which we're speaking to.

I know with the programs that are available here—there are 11,000 participants in nicotine replacement therapy. In the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Smoking Treatment for Ontario Patients, which is the STOP study, for 11,000 patients the cost of that six-week course is about $2.5 million.

I guess the question could be that the nicotine replacement therapy—are we actually assisting those children in Caledonia who are exposed to a higher rate of second-hand smoke by reducing cigarettes that are available to them? Certainly, I know that smoking rates among Canadian aboriginal youth far outstrip those of their non-native peers. Statistics Canada figures show that 61% of First Nation girls aged 15 to 17 are smokers, compared to 15% of girls of that age in the general population; while 47% of First Nation boys 15 to 17 smoke, compared to 13% of their non-native peers. That topic has been brought up many times in the Legislature, but there are certainly some startling statistics that show we need to protect those children who have access to illegal cigarettes at reduced prices and don't understand the impacts they're having.

I certainly agree that it's our duty to work towards doing what we can to bring this awareness of education to Ontarians about these harmful effects, especially with children in confined spaces, as in cars, which we're speaking to today. Again, I'm going to refer to the resolution from my colleague the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, our health critic, from December of last year, which specifically indicated the need for a province-wide education campaign for parents and others about the dangers to children associated with smoke in their vehicles. Again, we've had examples this morning in the Legislature of just yesterday seeing adults smoking with children in their cars. There's just no excuse. We have to act on this. I'm glad, as I said, about the road-to-Damascus conversion from both the Minister of Health Promotion and the Premier to have advanced this legislation earlier than the end of the year, as was first reported.

The minister referenced this in her statement following the introduction of Bill 69: A 2005 Health Canada study estimated that in a one-month period, 144,000 children in this province are exposed to second-hand smoke in vehicles. I'll repeat that figure, because it's quite astounding: 144,000 children are exposed to second-hand smoke each month. The resolution was brought forward by the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, our health critic, in December. I bring these time frames out intentionally. If the Liberals across the way had been responsible enough to act on that and have an education program put in place, there could have been a better chance for those 144,000 kids affected each month to breathe more safely and easily. I guess the political climate just wasn't right back in December. It's right now.

As I said, it's legislation that we're supporting. It's up to the government, at the end of the day, to ensure that people have the facts and are aware of the hazardous effects of second-hand smoke, particularly in respect to the dangers to children.

0950

The Ontario Medical Association has been loud and clear about the dangers to children of exposure to second-hand smoke. They've been calling on this action for four years. One of the Liberal members had stated that back in the 1960s, I believe it was, that information had been brought forward. I know we're in 2008 now, but those statistics have been around and some awareness had been around back then. It's interesting that it has taken so long to get the studies done, but we are here now.

In January of this year, the head of the Ontario Medical Association, Dr. Janice Willett, stated clearly that Ontario can't afford to drag its heels on this issue, "I sure hope it's at the top of their docket," and "We think it is a no-brainer.... It's about protecting the most vulnerable who can't protect themselves."

At that point, the minister was still content to wait until the end of the year, but it was missing a clear opportunity. As I say, education and awareness are the key components to protecting children from the harms of second-hand smoke. The Canadian Cancer Society, which does a great deal of work for all of us in the province of Ontario, quotes a California study:

"In 2005, the state of California's Air Resources Board compared a large number of studies measuring second-hand particle concentrations in different environments and found that in-car concentrations, with smoking and no ventilation, were up to 60 times greater than in a smoke-free home, and up to 27 times greater than in a smoker's home.

"The research showed that even under full ventilation,"—you just can't roll the window down in the car—"interior respirable particle concentrations were at least 13 times that of outdoor concentration. With no ventilation, these particle concentrations reached levels as high as 300 times outdoor particle concentration.

"Second-hand smoke increases the risk of asthma and ear infections in children and is related to sudden infant death syndrome and respiratory health....

"'We encourage parents and caregivers not to wait for this bill to pass to protect their children,' Goodhand said. 'When you buckle up, butt out.'"

I think that's a great slogan that we can move forward with. Again, that was from the Canadian Cancer Society.

As we've said and my colleagues have brought forward, it's education, education, education. It is for our children.

The Ontario Lung Association is another stakeholder group that has been pushing for this legislation. They put out in their April 30 press release, "Second-hand smoke is a leading trigger for children with asthma, causing more asthma attacks and symptoms. As high as 20% of Ontario children suffer from asthma, one of the highest rates in the country."

If anyone has had a family member with asthma, or as I've seen many times as a nurse, when an asthma attack happens, it needs immediate attention and can certainly lead to death. In many of our rural ridings—I actually worked with a nurse who had an asthma attack on her way to work and subsequently died because she couldn't get there fast enough and there was no help on the roads. I've seen an increase in the general population and people who I've been in contact with in respect to childhood asthma. I've never seen so many cases of childhood asthma. This is certainly one of the triggers for childhood asthma and for all asthmas and needs to be taken very seriously.

"The science speaks for itself," as the president and CEO, George Habib, from the Lung Association says. "Children face the greatest health risk and are the least able to protect themselves against second-hand smoke in their family vehicle. This legislation gives a strong voice to the backseat, in the best interest of children. It's absolutely the right thing to do."

He refers to the "recent Ipsos Reid poll conducted by the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network found that 86% of Ontario non-smokers and 66% of Ontario smokers support legislation that would ban smoking in vehicles carrying children under the age of 16." With that, I say that's great. The smokers are actually realizing this.

I think that many of you will see that most people don't smoke in their own homes anymore. If there are other people there, they go to the back porch. There's a lot of pressure.

I tease my one girlfriend. We were in line together at the cashier, and the people ahead of us were buying cigarettes, and the child actually started crying and said, "Mommy, they're going to die. They're buying cigarettes." I think that the education component of the harmful effects of cigarettes has done a great job with our children, because they're now educating their parents. It was a little embarrassing, because we didn't know the people and the child was already crying that those people may pass on because they were buying cigarettes. Certainly, we can see that the anti-smoking campaign—we've had a good start with our children, and they're trying to educate our family members and society at large that the harmful effects of smoking and second-hand smoke are devastating.

I know the lung association is a great organization, as well. It's one of Canada's oldest voluntary non-profit health promotion organizations which I've found—that's the good part of this job: As you get the chance to do research and delve into issues, you find these wonderful statistics. The lung association is concerned with the prevention and control of asthma, chronic lung disease caused by smoking, and with air quality and its effect on lung health. It was incorporated in 1945 and has community offices across the province. They do a great job, because there is nothing scarier than not being able to catch your breath and the panic that incurs—and of course that just enhances the already problematic situation of not being able to breathe—and anxiety. It's very, very difficult to try to calm someone down when you're in a medical setting and you have all the tools available; it's really, really hard when it's out in the community and that happens. So there are certainly challenges that we have out there.

Dr. Suzanne Strasberg, the OMA board chair, says, "Protecting the health of Ontario's children is one of our most important jobs. Given that the concentration of smoke in cars can be up to 60 times greater than in concentrations indoors, the need for such a ban is undeniable." I don't have a date on that. That was in response to the legislation that was brought forward.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation, which is very big in our communities, is a volunteer-based health charity that leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke, reducing their impacts through the advancement of research and its application, and the promotion of healthy living and advocacy. I know many of you have recently worked with them with respect to the defibrillation programs that have been in our riding, with defibrillators placed everywhere. They're a great organization. Again, education is key with them. They do a great job of going out into our communities.

The CEO of their foundation, Rocco Rossi, said the new rules are designed to protect children from 4,000 dangerous chemicals found in second-hand cigarette smoke and most drivers think the legislation is an idea whose time has come.

"The car is already a regulated environment with specific rules for seatbelts and child seats, so the amendment is not the 'slippery slope' as some have suggested or feared"—which is referring to the Premier's comments from last year. "It reflects the natural and prudent desire to protect those who can't protect themselves; namely our children."

Again, he quotes the statistic that 66% of smokers and 86% of non-smokers support legislation that bans smoking in cars when children under 16 are present.

"This will provide an enormous health benefit as they grow into adulthood. We encourage all parties to support the legislation."

I think we're hearing comments in thee Legislature today that we've seen support from many groups in the community—they have been promoting this for years—and that we should move ahead in this matter.

I know that the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario is supportive of this legislation.

It being Nursing Week this week, I want to thank all the nurses in the province for all the hard work and front-line work that they do in assisting those who are unwell and also in the educational component. As a nurse, myself, I can tell you that a lot of your day is educating

patients you're dealing with. We have nurses in the community, as well, who educate a lot of families and children and first-time mums, so they're exposed to a large spectrum of the public. They're front-line in life and death situations but also in education and prevention. So I thank them on behalf of all of the Legislature. I know that many of you, in your ridings, are going to be out and either following a nurse or speaking to nurses this week, it being Nursing Week. I know that I have two functions in my riding that I can attend. I'll be speaking to some nurses at Haliburton Highlands Health Services. Also, I'll go to Ross Memorial Hospital in Lindsay, where I nursed until I was fortunate enough to be elected into the Legislature. I always make a point of going there on the Friday of Nursing Week to congratulate and praise them and assist in the activities they do. So I thank my home hospital and warn them that I'll be there Friday again.

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I've read that other stakeholders have been in support of this legislation. I know the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health has been a strong advocate. Again, they do an amazing job—Mental Health and Addiction 101, the innovative response to such questions, the education and training department they have. They present 14 interactive, online tutorials. April 22 was the Celebrating Innovation in Health Care Expo; they were at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. So again, getting out in their communities, exposing people to the services they offer with online tutorials, which is the new Internet stage that we are at in life. That exposes a lot more people to the education system and to help. So again, it's a good organization that does a lot of health prevention and promotion.

I want to speak a little bit about some of the concerns that we have in the legislation. I want to thank the ministry staff for the briefing they gave last week. They phoned and offered the briefing on the bill, and I want to thank them for that. We asked them questions about the legal and enforcement concerns that we have and how that's going to work.

The proposed legislation specifically states that the law would prohibit persons from smoking or having lighted tobacco in a motor vehicle if another person who is less than 16 years old is inside the same vehicle. Any person—it can be the driver or the passenger—in the car who is smoking with someone under the age of 16 present would be committing an offence.

It includes cars moving or stationary, regardless of windows or a sunroof being open or a convertible. So you can't just say, "Well, yes I was smoking, but the windows were down, the sunroof was open." As I've said, in some of the statistics and studies that I've read, that doesn't cut it. You're still exposed to the second-hand smoke.

Those failing to comply are guilty of an offence and subject to a $250 fine. I know from the ministry briefing—and we asked this—that it's not considered a traffic violation. It's under the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, so it's not considered a traffic violation. There's no increased fine for the second, third or further violations by the same person. So the fine for repeated offences remains the same, it's $250, $250, $250. That is a little different. I know the private member's bill that was introduced had a different range of fines, so that's a little bit of a different part of the legislation that I just wanted to mention.

So where would the offence fall on a person's record? I guess there's a heavy reliance on the police to enforce this legislation, if passed, which begs the question, how would the legislation be enforced? My colleague from Simcoe North articulates very well that the province is already far short of having enough police officers to enforce the Highway Traffic Act. Yesterday, he made a statement in the Legislature about the importance of the work that our police officers in Ontario do, as we recognized their work during Police Week. I want to join in his sentiments and congratulate and thank the 31,000 front-line police officers who protect the streets, roads, waterways and communities across our great province.

On this side of the House, we have a tremendous amount of faith and respect for the work of our law enforcement officers. Some of them were here in the Legislature not long ago bringing forward their concerns that they see on the front lines, and how we can all better collectively make our communities safer. I know I meet with my police officers on a regular basis. I see them in my riding. Unfortunately, I've been to too many of their retirement parties as of late, but I thank them for their many decades of work in that respect. You see them out in their communities—and always in a good way; they haven't pulled me over or anything—out at functions, because they do a lot of community work not just in their jobs, but in their off hours. I know that Cops for Cancer has just recently been through our ridings. There was a big celebration with Cops for Cancer in Peterborough on Saturday, where they had children with cancer—unfortunately, I know a few of those right at this present time. They had given the children with cancer—they rode for the last part of the journey and they were given a bicycle. I think that's just one example of the tremendous work that our police officers do, not just in protecting their communities but giving back to their communities for the various causes they have. I certainly haven't succumbed to the shave-your-head-type fundraisers they do, but I know they have been out there recently, doing that type of fundraising and encouraging children and other members of the community to get involved in that.

Back to the enforcement side of this: It is the police who will be enforcing this. To simply suggest that those officers will be able to enforce this new legislation because they happen to be the ones enforcing traffic safety begs further questions. I've already said that it's hard to have enough police officers to enforce the traffic act. I know that the minister of public safety has tried many times to take credit for the addition of 1,000 new cops, and he has talked about full funding. We know that his government never really fully funded one officer. The most they've put in is 35% toward an officer that costs

$100,000 for the taxpayers. The previous PC government put in the framework for those 1,000 new police officers. The current provincial government is only really putting 35% of the pay toward those officers. The ministry of safety blames the federal government for some failures in adding new police officers, despite the federal government's kick-start assistance. When you start having 600 OPP officers on a weekend between the two years of unrest in both Caledonia and Deseronto, you need new officers—

Mr. Mike Colle: Is this about the smoke-free act?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, because we're talking about officers and enforcement.

In Caledonia, and you add to that Deseronto, you need new officers. You're taking those officers out of other communities in the province. Instead of following his leader's cue in blaming anyone else for their failures, how about the minister work with the federal government in providing those 1,000 new officers for the province of Ontario? It doesn't seem unreasonable. Again, you can't put politics ahead of principles. Bill 69 adds further reliance on an already stretched police force in the province.

Not all young people and children carry identification with them, so again, in the briefing, when we talked about the enforcement, we asked, "How do you know if they're 16, they're younger, they're older?" If a police officer feels that a person is 16 or younger, a fine can be assessed to the person in the vehicle who is smoking a tobacco product. What if that young person believed to be under 16 just happens to look young, but is actually older than 16? The onus is then placed on the person who is charged with the offence to prove that he or she was incorrectly charged.

So now we have to go the courts because not all children—or if there happen to be their parents with them—identification is not easily obtained. People don't carry that around with them at that age. So we're going to have to go to the courts, then. We already know that the courts are burdened and they're backlogged. It's going to be up to the municipalities, I guess, which are also overburdened with regulations and increased costs of services, to track down those who haven't paid their fines under this legislation. I know that there are a number of municipalities, some in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, that have passed resolutions to support the intent of Bill 69.

As always, the devil is in the details. I certainly think it's vital that we get this to committee and flesh out how this is all going to work together—police officers, municipalities, the fines, whose record it goes on, the reverse onus of someone proving that their age is actually over 16. Part of legislation and why we go to committee is to work out some questions we have, and all the stakeholders can come before us and provide those details, certainly in terms of what I mentioned but also the educational perspective of the health units, the communities, how the Ministry of Health Promotion is going to be involved with those communities, and the enforcement and education angle. A full-scale, proper education component is probably going to be the most important aspect of this legislation in order to protect kids.

I mentioned some of the legal issues. I'd like to expand on that, because there is a huge double standard being promoted by the government across the way. The Premier stated, with respect to this legislation, Bill 69, "We need to do everything we can to keep our children safe and healthy." It's a profound statement, which I agree totally with.

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I do have to question the Premier's and the Liberal government's sincerity when I brought up many, many times—and I do mean this very sincerely and am concerned about this—the illegal smoke shacks that exist. I know that we have highlighted in Caledonia the illegal cigarettes that are for sale, especially being so close to two schools. It's unfortunate that the Minister of Health Promotion and the parliamentary assistant, the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, voted against the protection of children in Caledonia. We tabled that on April 29 in the Legislature, that the sale of these illegal cigarettes is being facilitated by the Liberal government because the smoke shack is on crown land, metres from the schools. It's unfortunate that the government has been quiet on that. The question has been deferred and we have eviction notices here and there, and third parties sending eviction notices. We're trying to piece the tale together. But if children can purchase cheap and dangerous cigarettes without so much as being asked for identification, that is not acceptable. We have to change that. We're saying that; we brought the motion forward. I have asked many questions in the Legislature, because it's not fair to the children there. They're exposed. The harmful effects that they will see—we want to help prevent those harmful effects from second-hand smoke and from smoking, which is what is occurring. If there's easy access, there aren't the education programs there. You can go on your bicycle, buy a package of cheap cigarettes, put it in the hamper, drive off and give it to your friends, who could be as young as seven. That's not good health promotion in the province of Ontario.

There are statistics quoted—I have a cigarette butt survey that was done in November 2007 by the Canadian Convenience Stores Association. They commissioned the study through the We Expect ID program. The researchers visited 55 schools and collected thousands of cigarette butts to analyze. In Durham, 28% of cigarette butts found around schools were illicit; 36% in Peel; with Mississauga, as high as 44%; in Toronto, 23% were illegal cigarettes in this butt study done by the Canadian Convenience Stores Association. I'm highlighting this because it's frightening. That's a huge demographic that we're missing. We can't be guardians of youth and ignore the large numbers—I think 37%, it is now—of illicit cigarettes that are being sold in this province to the people of Ontario.

Contraband cigarettes—no government inspections, product testing or review—finding their way into our

streets: I read the list of hazardous materials you find in legal cigarettes. Can you imagine what would be in illegal cigarettes? I ask that question. We don't know, but it's not going to be less hazardous products; it's going to be more hazardous products being sold, as I said, at a low value to school children, in smoke shops—in this case they exist on government land, so it's a huge government responsibility—but also out of the trunks of cars. We all have these stories from our ridings of the illegal cigarettes that are sold out of the trunks of cars. They're not asking for ID. They're not saying that it's been tested. There are just no questions asked. There's a huge revenue we're missing which could help the government; they could be using it for education programs and for more programs, if needed, to help people stop smoking.

If illegal cigarettes account for 30% of all cigarettes sold in the province, and it's estimated to go to 50% by the year 2010, I say it's not working. Your health promotion, your anti-smoking—you can't ignore that 37% statistic of illegal cigarettes in the province. So when you have success—the government claims that smoking is down 18.7% in its time in office. Well, I hope it is down, but you really can't ignore the statistics that 37% of cigarettes are bought or sold illegally in Ontario. That skews your whole number system. It's good that the government's promise to cover the cost of smoking cessation products for all will be introduced, but you are ignoring a huge study out there that says that 37% are illegal.

We've tried to assist the government, pointing out these illegal smoke shops on government-owned land with schools so close by. That's just not a good picture. We want to help all the people in Ontario; we can't exclude some. I'm hoping that the government is taking steps to shut that operation down, and further steps for enforcement to stop the 37% illegal sale of tobacco. It's a huge health factor. As I said, you just cannot ignore it. You can't turn a blind eye to this burgeoning trade of smoke shops. They're projecting that 50% of sales are going to be illegal sales by the year 2010. We can't ignore that. We can't have double standards. The minister can't sit idle on that side of the Legislature and say she is protecting all the children of Ontario when the children who are buying the illegal cigarettes and the adults who are buying them are not being protected. We are not protecting them. We are not helping them.

When the website says "to protect all Ontarians regardless of where they are located in the province," that's what we expect to see and that's what we've been trying to chase this government down on: letting them know where we know there are illegal smoke shops, especially that they're on government property. They could do something maybe a little quicker on that facility, but that shouldn't exist anywhere in Ontario because we are exposing more children to cigarettes, getting them addicted to cigarettes. We have to protect children all over the province. Bill 69 is a good step forward, but we can't ignore that other fact that was brought forward about the illegal smoke shops and the number of people smoking contraband cigarettes.

The protection of children was brought forward by another colleague of mine, the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills. He brought forward some very thoughtful amendments to Bill 12, the adoption disclosure bill. That was to ensure that children who were abused, removed from the home and subsequently adopted could be automatically protected. We're talking about protecting children from having their personal information disclosed. So it would have protected children who had been physically or sexually abused from parents who abused them. The Liberal members on that committee voted that down.

Once again, we want to protect children. We want to protect all children in Ontario. A health professional whom I have great respect for, the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, who is closely tied to the Liberal Party regardless of the political opportunity over principles, voted that down, and that's protecting children. You are saying that the Liberals are creating a legal right for a violently abusive birth parent to find out the adoptive name of the child they abused—then with protecting the safety and peace of mind of the abused victim. They are abused children. They're not going to mature in their adulthood as quickly because they didn't come from a normal background, and we need to protect them further.

Again, we brought that forward to protect the children, and Bill 69 is about protecting children. This should be a consistent concept that weaves its way through all legislation that we see in this Legislature before us, including the members of the Liberal Party. So when you defeat that type of amendment that would have protected children and victims, that's political opportunism; that's not responsible government. Time allocation was brought forward and the members of the Liberal Party voted that down.

The member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills has been one of the first politicians, actually, not just with his work with the adoption bills—many have been seen here protecting those children. But he was also one of the first politicians who talked about the dangers of smoking and second-hand smoke in the workplace, way back in 1983, certainly before I was elected to the Legislature. I can't say it was before I was born, but we can always try. But in 1983, the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills brought forward and talked about the dangers of smoking and second-hand smoke.

Again, we want to protect children on all fronts. I mentioned earlier about the fact that my colleague and critic for the Ministry of Health brought forward the resolution back in December with respect to second-hand smoke in vehicles with children present. In January, she sent a letter to the Premier—January 2007, by the way—with respect to the fact that the Minister of Health Promotion—not the same minister at this time—was content to wait and not debate the importance of this issue.

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Some of the contents of the letter from Ms. Witmer:

"As we recognize National Non-Smoking Week, I call on your government to take action to immediately

implement a new anti-smoking initiative to introduce an effective province-wide campaign to educate parents and others of the dangers of smoking in motor vehicles while children are inside.

"However, despite the fact that health advocates across Ontario are actively expressing their desire for you to make this issue a top priority for your government," the Minister of Health Promotion is postponing this. Such delay "is of great concern since reports suggest second-hand smoke in a vehicle is 23 times more toxic than in a house, due to smaller enclosed space."

She concludes:

"When I consider research which indicates that children and youth are particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of second-hand smoke, I ask you, can this province afford to gamble with the health of even one child?" I can certainly tell you that no, it cannot afford to gamble with the health of even just one child.

I congratulate the member for her advocacy on behalf of the children of this province, for bringing this forward to the attention of the Premier. I think it's one of the reasons why we are debating this legislation today. We are happy to see that it has been brought earlier than first noticed.

When we talk about bringing forward an educational campaign for parents and others of the dangers of smoking in vehicles with children inside—again, that statistic of 144,000 children per month exposed to the harmful effects of second-hand smoke—we had to wait until the right political opportunity came along. When I received the summary from the Ministry of Health Promotion, it indicated the following: If the bill is passed, the ministry will work with police organizations and public health units to educate people about the dangers of second-hand smoke and encourage voluntary compliance, and support implementation of the proposed ban, including ensuring that the appropriate enforcement mechanisms are in place.

As I've said many times but I am repeating so we can get to this part, the educational aspect is very critical in this legislation. I'd like to know the specifics of how the Minister of Health Promotion plans to spend—we see that she has a budget—because it's going to cost money. So where are those educational dollars to bring awareness of the dangers of second-hand smoke? What is the plan? I guess that's the basic line of that.

Another concern about Bill 69 is the fact that it's an amendment to the existing Smoke-Free Ontario Act and is only specific to tobacco. It does not include other legal, yet dangerous, materials such as medicinal marijuana. That's certainly an apparent loophole.

In March, my colleague from Burlington, under the very best intentions of protecting people, including children, from the negative effects of second-hand smoke and from materials beyond just cigarette tobacco, presented her Bill 42. I was certainly pleased to speak in support of it. She crafted it in a way to close the loophole in the McGuinty government's own anti-smoking legislation, which fails to include medicinal marijuana and controlled substances in the definition, thereby allowing these products to be smoked in public places where cigarettes are not allowed. It just doesn't make sense. I'm sure it's just a loophole. We were trying to bring that loophole in the smoke-free Ontario legislation forward.

It has been on TV many times—Gator Ted's is the facility that's involved, and they were here on the day that the member from Burlington brought forward that legislation. I think it was on CTV last week; it was in the news again.

Unfortunately, in the private members' committee, where this bill was being discussed, the Liberals used their majority. They killed that bill moving forward, even though in the Legislature the day we debated it, it did get support from all party members. I was hoping the Premier would pay attention to the fact that his party members, on that day private members' bills were brought forward, were in support of that, but he silenced them.

I'm asking the Minister of Health Promotion to maybe put some pressure at the cabinet table to look at that again. I'm sure it was just a loophole, it was oversight, when it was first introduced. But, really, it's not fair to have the public and children exposed to second-hand smoke of medicinal marijuana. There's a place and a time. It is medicinal marijuana, it does have a purpose, but we're saying it shouldn't be in a public spot where the exposure to second-hand smoke from medicinal marijuana. That's what the excellent member for Burlington—she heard from her constituents and brought that legislation forward. We're saying—we're talking about Bill 69 here—maybe we should look at that angle as it relates to both Bill 69 and the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

Again, we cannot have double standards. I've mentioned a few double standards in the Legislature today and before. We are here to say that we think you've got this wrong; this is how we can help; this is what we're proposing. I'm hoping that the government does act on this private member's bill that the member for Burlington brought forward. We need to ensure—the government is trying to appear to ensure—that we are safe when travelling in a vehicle where a person is subjected to the toxins that are coming out. Again, it's not just tobacco; it's medicinal marijuana. It's a fair question, as are the many examples I've mentioned here before.

I know, Mr. Speaker, we're almost getting—it's been a long hour. We've shared many statistics.

Interjections.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Look at my great team behind me: "Don't quit now. We want another hour." I don't know if you'd get unanimous consent for another hour from everyone involved.

Interjections.

Ms. Laurie Scott: There are more people than at the 9 o'clock start, for sure, where we were very skeletal and we didn't have any motion to bring coffee in. I don't know if that would entice more members to start in the Legislature at 9, but it was a good mention by my colleague last week when we started this new rotation.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I heard you were speaking. I rushed in at 9:05.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, I'm just thrilled to hear that. We didn't quite get to 10 members at the start of the Legislature this morning, but I'm sure that the whips will get everybody trained so that there are enough people here to start at 9 o'clock in the morning. So that's good.

It's been an excellent opportunity to speak about many issues this morning on the protection of children in Ontario from many different angles. This has been good for the Ministry of Health Promotion. It was a new ministry created, I believe, in 2003. Another member was in, and now we have a new member of the Legislature as the Minister of Health Promotion. I'm sure she has the best intentions. She has been given some tools by the present government in order to do what the ministry says it is to do, and that's health promotion in many different aspects.

We're here to say, "How are you spending that money? Are you getting the education values in this respect? Is the prevention going to work and is it going to be enforced?" We've asked many questions about Bill 69 on that, as well as woven in other concerns we have about protecting children all across the province of Ontario.

Governments have to lead by example. I brought up my strong concerns, and I know they've been brought up many, many times by other members in the Legislature, about protecting all Ontarians equally. We're talking about smoking in vehicles and banning that smoking; we're talking about second-hand smoke for children in cars. But you have to say to yourselves, "Now, here's the province of Ontario. How are we going to enforce it? Where are some spots where we need to clean up our act or better protect children?"

I brought up the smoke shacks that certainly would be appealing to children who want to experiment. They haven't heard all the information about the dangers of smoking; maybe they have parents who smoke. That concerns us when there is a smoke shop that is so close to two schools, the one example that we've been using, trying to highlight the fact that 37% of cigarettes for sale are illegal and have not been tested and contain more hazardous materials than cigarettes that are tested and legally sold.

We have good business practices in our small businesses or our convenience store operations that sell tobacco, and they're trying to comply in the timeline they have with the power wall. They are making sure they're identifying the young people who are coming in. They're doing all the right practices. Then we have, on the other hand, the over 30% of cigarettes that are bought illegally. No one's making those checks.

1030

You, as government, have to set examples. All of us in this Legislature have to protect the children. There are problems out there; we're helping identify them for you to act on. You would be good leaders and better at protecting children if you'd take some of our concerns forward and enforce the protections that are needed out there for the children.

So I want to say that we should do more. I want more discussion on the illegal smoke shops and the illicit cigarettes that are being sold.

Bill 69 is a step forward in protecting children from second-hand smoke in cars. The public health units in my area, as I've mentioned, have been fantastic at carrying forward this message. I assume they're going to be given a larger part in this education. But it's up to all of us to help educate the public about these serious effects.

When we're discussing the safety and the health of our children, it's of the utmost importance that we look at all the facets, where the loopholes are.

Under much pressure from either surveys or polls or newspapers or politicians—even politicians within the Liberal Party forcing their government to bring this earlier, the OMA asking for four years, the lung association asking for a long time. We're happy to see that the legislation was brought forward. We want to get it to committee to get it through its steps—the democratic process of hearing the feedback on how it's going to work and how we get to measure its success.

We've mentioned that the police officers are a very large part of this. Will there be enough of them to watch for this? They enforce seat belt laws; they enforce speeding laws. Is it only if they happen to pull them over for another violation that they can make this charge? I'm sure that they would if they could. But are they intentionally going to pull over cars when they see a puff of smoke coming out? Are there enough of them? Is that going to be a priority? I'm hoping the minister has consulted with our police officers, since they're key to the enforcement here—how the fines are going to work, what the follow-up is going to be.

I know that we're getting close to our new question period time of 10:45, and I'm sure there are some questions and comments from members of the Legislature on this. Thank you for the opportunity to do the leadoff for the PC Party. I look forward to questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^me^ France Gélinas: I certainly have a few comments for my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. She mentioned that she's a nurse herself, and this being Nursing Week, I figure it would be appropriate to say congratulations. I hope Nursing Week goes well for every nurse in this province.

I also want to focus on the role that nurses have been playing in trying to move the Smoke-Free Ontario agenda forward from way back when.

Another colleague mentioned that the idea of banning smoking was first introduced in 1960 and we talked about it again in 1983 following some of the new research on the terrifying effects of cigarette smoking on health.

I also want to mention that I was working in the hospital sector in the early 1980s, and I can remember going

to patients' rooms and actually lighting up cigarettes for people who were not able to get out of bed, and it was really okay. I remember going into a hospital in Sudbury where the floor around the beds was all burned because bedridden people would drop their cigarettes and there was nobody there to pick them up. They went to tiles so that they could just replace the tiles around the bed, because month after month they would get burned. That was the way of life. My colleague mentioned that she was at meetings where everybody talked about public health yet smoked. The same thing happened in my experience: The hospital cafeteria was blue with smoke and so were patients' rooms.

We've come a long way. This bill is a tiny, weenie little step on a long journey.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I was intently listening to the debate, the speech from my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and I think she is supporting this bill. I think it was there somewhere in the first five or 10 minutes, and I congratulate her and the PC caucus for supporting this particular bill. I want to congratulate the Premier, the Minister of Health Promotion, the member from Sault Ste. Marie and the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for their leadership in forwarding this bill.

Leadership is about listening, and in this instance we have a clear indication that the Premier, the Minister of Health Promotion and her parliamentary assistant listened to Ontarians and took action in that regard. They listened to the member from Sault Ste. Marie and the bill he proposed and then took action. That is leadership, and they are to be commended.

I've heard a lot about this particular bill from my constituents in Ottawa Centre, and I must say that there is overwhelming support from the people of Ottawa Centre that we should ban smoking in cars when there are children involved.

I'll be very honest: There is a very small minority of people out there that does not support this bill, and I've heard from them as well. I will give them the point of view—the point of view in this House, the point of view I've given to them—that this legislation is about harm reduction. This legislation is about protecting those who are vulnerable. If somebody wants to continue smoking and if they are an adult, they are free to do so. We hope that they quit, because it's in their best interest in terms of health, but that is something that's up to them. But this particular legislation is trying to protect our children, to ensure that they are not subject to second-hand smoke. We know that studies have proven that in confined spaces like cars, the risk is much higher.

Once again, I will be voting in support of this legislation.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Bill 69 bans smoking in cars where children are present. The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock did an excellent job during this past hour.

MPP Scott made reference to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. I worked there for 20 years. Our job was to provide a foundation of research for policy-makers, and it does raise the question: Where is the research with respect to this particular initiative? What percentage of the population smokes in cars when children are present? I would like to know what the health objective is here. What will be monitored? How will this initiative be evaluated with respect to any success or failure? How will it be enforced? Is this a law that we don't need? Will the parents who are doing this respect this particular law? In the end, will it solve the problem?

We know that six months ago, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, banned smoking. Is this government merely trying to catch up? Is this the flavour of the day? Do we see a herd mentality here?

So I ask the McGuinty government, where are the data? Where are the statistics? Where is the research evidence to go forward with this type of approach? I ask the question—we do have to project into the future—what is the next step? Parents have children in their apartments. Will we see this government ban smoking in apartments, in condominiums or in homes? Where does the realm of parental responsibility lie with this present Ontario government?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to speak to this, even for a brief time. I'll save most of my comments for the next day of debate.

First of all, I wanted to highlight that certainly everybody in the NDP is going to support this bill. It's an inch where we need a mile, but we will support it.

I think what is telling is the difference in the budget of the Minister of Health and the budget of the Minister of Health Promotion. It's $350 million to $375 million for health promotion and $40 billion for health. So clearly, this is an administration that's more interested in patching people up than in keeping them healthy in the first place.

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If they were interested in keeping them healthy—

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I see that the Minister of Education has entered the room and is heckling me, but that's okay.

We would be putting money into our school pools, for example. We would be putting money into a number of ventures, including some stiff environmental laws, because after all, the high rate of asthma that our children are facing now—which is really quite unprecedented. I know that when my son was young, he had a brief bout of asthma, but now one in four children are taking puffers to school in some schools. We need to do something and we need to do something dramatic.

The other problem with this bill, of course, is enforcement. Our overworked, under-resourced police force are now going to have yet something else put on their plate, with no money with which to do it. If anybody's going to drive around with their local police forces—and I certainly have, with the 14 and 11 divisions in my riding—you'll see that the last thing on their minds is enforcing smoking in cars. They've got far weightier matters and they're stressed to the max even trying to deal with those—so again, enforcement.

This is motherhood and apple pie. Of course we'll support it in the New Democratic Party. We just wish that was it was a lot more than simply a salve, falling on the heels of Nova Scotia, and actually made a dramatic difference to health in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I thank my colleagues for their questions and comments on our leadoff on Bill 69.

I was chuckling to myself when the member from Nickel Belt was telling stories about the cigarette butts on the tiles, and the tiles being replaced. I remember when I first started nursing in the 1980s, the nurses themselves actually smoked on the night shift at the nurses' station. So yes, we've come a long way.

We need to do more. This is a small step. We're certainly supporting this when we speak in this respect to the safety and health of our children. As I've said, that does trump everything, and what we have to do as legislators is to protect those vulnerable people in our society.

I mentioned the history of the bill. It was first introduced by the member from Sault Ste. Marie. It didn't look like we were going to have a lot of movement from the government quickly, but that has changed now. I know that the Ontario Medical Association has said that sooner is better for the health of children that are involved. The Ontario Medical Association, the Lung Association and the various groups that I and other members have mentioned in our comments have been calling for this legislation for years.

Other provinces such as British Columbia and Nova Scotia have already taken action. This has been a comment that we're not leaders here in the province of Ontario, we're kind of following the rest of the pack, but at least the legislation is being brought forward earlier than the Premier and the Minister of Health Promotion said it was going to be brought forward.

We know the bill needs to go to committee. We need to get some feedback from stakeholders, but we also need to talk about the enforcement, the police officers that are already overburdened. How are they going to enforce this? What education component is going to be involved? How are we to know that the Ministry of Health Promotion is spending the money in appropriate spots for education? And of course, if this impact is on municipalities—what the enforcement is.

I thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I see my time is up.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time being close to 10:45, the debate stands adjourned.

Second reading debate adjourned.

WEARING OF CARNATIONS

Hon. Michael Bryant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I am seeking unanimous consent for members to wear carnations in support of the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Brant, we'd like to welcome some members from his constituency office staff to the Legislature today: Jessica Fennema, Anam Ahmed, Tina Draycott and Heather Gaukel.

On behalf of the member from Sarnia–Lambton, two guests in the west members' gallery: Marg Gagne and Norma Campbell, both from Lambton county.

In the Speaker's gallery, I'd like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Mouldi Sakri and his assistant Mr. Mohamed Elloumi to the gallery today.

On behalf of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, we'd like to welcome guests from the MS Society of Canada, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: Kris McDonald, Mike Roche, Ian Greaves and Asad Wali.

On behalf of page Cali Van Bommel, in the Speaker's gallery: her friends Emma Snyders, Kerrie Snyders, Abbie Snyders, Hannah Snyders and Maggie Snyders.

On behalf of page Hannah Jansen, family members who will be visiting today: Nancy Millson, her grandmother; Lillie Millson, her cousin; Gregory Millson, her cousin; Brad Millson, her uncle; and Sherry Millson, her aunt.

On behalf of page Joanna Wang, in the east public gallery: Grace Zang, her mother, and Kerry Wang, her father.

Welcome to all of our guests visiting Queen's Park today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier, and it has to do with the crushing blow to Windsor and Ontario's economy with yesterday's announcement of 1,400 job cuts at General Motors.

GM is the largest recipient of grant money from this government—$235 million—and it has announced the largest number of job cuts. The more money this government invests in a company, it seems the more jobs are lost. The Premier frequently talks about his five-step plan. We wonder if that's one of the steps.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We remain very much determined to continue to find ways to partner with the business sector, the auto sector in particular. Ontarians have enjoyed some tremendous successes in that regard. There have been 13 separate projects in which we have co-invested. Each of these has required that the private sector enterprise make a significant new investment in

the Ontario economy. Many of those have created new jobs—in fact, thousands of jobs—and some of those have secured existing jobs. But all of those have, as a common thread, the requirement that there be significant new investment made in the Ontario economy.

If we could have found a way to secure all existing investments in the auto sector and in every other part of the private sector found throughout the province of Ontario, we would have done so, but obviously that's not the kind of thing that is feasible. We will continue to work with the auto sector and others to secure new investment.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Perhaps the Premier in the supplementary can be a little more specific, because these are secret deals, essentially. The minister has said that she doesn't want to reveal the details. We've no idea what strings were attached, if any.

GM recently offered $200 million to settle the American axle strike. Is that Ontario taxpayers' hard-earned money? We know that $117 million has already flowed to General Motors out of the $235-million commitment. How many jobs followed that $117 million of taxpayers' money? How many jobs did it create in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll let the Minister of Economic Development and Trade speak to some of the specifics, but let me give you one example. We were in stiff competition to land a new Toyota assembly plant here in Ontario. Competition was coming from south of the border. We came to the table with $85 million, and we secured a $1.1-billion investment on the part of Toyota. That means 1,300 new jobs. But it doesn't end there. Because we had that new nucleus of Toyota investment here, they then added Toyotetsu, a truck assembly plant, that created another 250 jobs. They then landed the Toyota Boshoku parts plant, which landed 365 more jobs. They then landed Toyota Tsusho Canada, which now ships parts, which has created another 10 jobs. They then added Maple Automotive Corp., which puts wheels and rims together for the RAV4. That's 30 jobs. Then they created Green Metals, Inc., which employs 10 workers who are recycling metal from the Toyota plant.

That's the result of a single new investment. We were proud to come to the table, and we'll continue to look for ways to have more new investment in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I hope viewers noted that the Premier didn't respond to the question. He's getting a note now. You would think yesterday and earlier that he would have known what $117 million of tax money that flowed to GM had done in terms of results. He clearly doesn't know. He doesn't have the answer here today, and that should be troubling to anyone who's concerned about the state of the Ontario economy. These job cuts at GM are another sad example of how wrong this government's policies are.

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In January of this year, David Adams, the president of the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada, said: "As it currently stands, Ontario is now one of the most expensive jurisdictions in the world to manufacture vehicles."

The consequences of your economic missteps are coming home to roost. For over two years we've called for an economic stimulus package: Reduce business taxes, kill red tape and kill the capital tax. When are you going to act to address this crisis?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm just not that negative on our economy. We just recently announced new investment in a Ford plant in Windsor. That was something that my colleagues opposed. We've learned recently that GM is going to produce its first-ever hybrid truck in North America here in Ontario.

The fact of the matter is, we remain very competitive, something I would ask my colleagues opposite to acknowledge. The single greatest dimension of our competitiveness has to do with the quality of our workers. There is no better group of people on the face of this planet—they are so effective, so determined to produce a quality product—than is found in the Ontario autoworkers. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to them. The CAW in particular has the strongest competitive advantage we enjoy and we will continue to work the international markets to secure still more investments, which our workers are capable of landing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Attorney General. Minister, you were copied with a letter dated April 29, 2008, from Chief Bill Montour of the Six Nations Council addressed to Minister Bryant. The letter reads: "First of all, I want to thank you on behalf of the Six Nations of the Grand River community for your intervention in the police action on Saturday April 26, 2008. Your intervention has been instrumental in the reopening of the Caledonia bypass."

Minister, this letter raises very serious and troubling questions about the interference of ministers in the enforcement of the law in this province. Have you commenced an investigation into this matter, and if not, why not?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I remember that the question was asked, I believe, for the first time last week. The minister spoke directly to it and said he did no such thing. The question was repeated to my colleague, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and he said he did no such thing. Because a letter is written, it does not make it so.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I don't think the Attorney General, in his role and with the responsibility he has, should slough it off in terms of the concerns expressed in this letter.

Chief Montour's letter doesn't just stop there, and I'm quoting again: "During the early evening of Saturday, an OPP camera vehicle was driving past the protest site

taking pictures of individuals. The people believe this action by the OPP was initiated to be able to identify certain individuals for future charges to be laid. To this end, I'm asking you to again intervene with your colleague ministers to ask the OPP to not lay charges."

Attorney General, have you investigated Chief Montour's request? Has anyone in this government intervened and asked the OPP to not lay charges? And if you haven't looked into this, why haven't you?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm going to give it to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm very—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment he just made, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I withdraw.

Hon. Michael Bryant: This is a question coming from a party that every single day in the Legislature asks the government to interfere with police operations on a regular basis and then today stands up, suddenly converted by the Ipperwash inquiry, which was on that government, and has decided that interfering with police operations is wrong.

In fact, interfering with police operations is not only unconstitutional and contrary to the Ipperwash inquiry; it's certainly contrary to the actions of every member of this government. I will say it again: The approach of this government is to leave operational matters in the hands of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary. The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: This letter is evidence that as far as Chief Montour is concerned, both the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister of Community Safety intervened with the OPP regarding the Caledonia blockade. Chief Montour is pleased with their intervention in the past, and he's asking them to do it again.

Minister, you have known about this since April 29. You have a duty to the crown and to Ontarians to uphold the law. Why have you taken no steps to investigate this? Will you commit today to calling in the RCMP to investigate these very serious allegations?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member may want to ask the Attorney General if he directs the police. I can tell you, this Attorney General does not direct the police. In fact, members of the executive council do not direct the police: not this minister, not that minister, not that minister. But that party would know about how to direct police, because they literally wrote the book on it. We had to hold a public inquiry into that party's activities. That's the party that wanted to "get the Indians out of the park."

This is the party and the government that called the Ipperwash inquiry and is implementing the Ipperwash inquiry and is following the recommendations of the Ipperwash inquiry.

Interjections.

Hon. Michael Bryant: No—shame on you.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, General Motors announced the closure of their last remaining auto plant in Windsor. It will effect the layoff of 1,400 workers. Premier, for the last few years you've been boasting about your auto investment strategy. Can you confirm that you gave close to $250 million to General Motors and there was absolutely nothing in your agreement with General Motors that was going to guarantee jobs in Windsor? Can you confirm that your government gave General Motors $250 million, or close to that, and forgot all about the GM workers in Windsor?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question. We did in fact co-invest together with GM. That was known broadly as the Beacon project. That involved investments in Oshawa, St. Catharines and Ingersoll. It did not attach itself to Windsor and this particular plant. There are specific conditions found within this particular co-investment package to ensure that we do secure that new investment and those new jobs. But, as I say, it did not attach itself to pre-existing investment.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, you and some of your cabinet ministers over the last while have made several visits to Windsor and generated several press releases. Here's one from August 2007, just before the election: "McGuinty Government's Auto Investments Deliver High-paying Jobs for Windsor." Can you tell those 1,400 General Motors workers who are now going to be out of work how your investment generated high-paying jobs for them in Windsor?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There are 13 projects in total. We co-invested with DaimlerChrysler, and that benefited Windsor. We co-invested with Valiant Corp.; that benefited Windsor. We co-invested with International Truck and Engine, Navistar, and that too benefited Windsor. Those were new investments.

So it is true that the people of Windsor have met with some terrible news in the loss of those jobs, and we'll do everything we can. I was on the phone this morning with Mayor Eddie Francis and a couple of the CAW representatives from the GM plant. We'll do everything we can to work with them to help them see themselves through this. But we've also landed new investments. We've secured new investments in many communities across the province, including other investments which have in fact benefited the community of Windsor.

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Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, there seems to be a problem with your math here. Windsor now has the highest unemployment rate in Ontario. The mayor of Windsor is asking WestJet to implement a direct flight from Windsor to Fort McMurray so that laid-off workers in Windsor will have some place to go to work. Auto jobs are disappearing out of Windsor faster than anyone can ever remember.

Tell me: You gave General Motors $235-million-plus of taxpayers' money. How could you totally forget about

the GM workers in Windsor while you were handing General Motors $235 million of Ontario taxpayers' money?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can see why it's in the leader of the NDP's interest to confuse this issue, but it's pretty straightforward. What we said is that when we came to the table with our new auto investment strategy—which was not supported by the NDP or the Conservatives, and which has landed over $7-billion worth of new investments and created thousands of new jobs in Ontario—the thread that was running through our new investment strategy was that we had to secure new investment. We had to either create new jobs or secure existing jobs, but there had to be new investment, and that's what we have done in each and every case as we rolled out this auto sector strategy. We have secured new investment, we have lent strength to more Ontario communities, and we have created thousands of new jobs. I'd like to be able to say that we could have secured all the pre-existing investments, but that was something that was just not on.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: I'm all too painfully aware of the reality. General Motors gets close to $250 million, and now we're seeing up to 3,500 jobs disappearing between Oshawa and Windsor. Ford gets $100 million, and we're seeing jobs disappear—another shift going at the St. Thomas assembly plant. Chrysler got money, and we continue to hear about jobs disappearing. This is the real economic story. And that's the question here: How can the McGuinty government hand out hundreds of millions of dollars, and meanwhile the workers who work in the auto plants that got the hundreds of millions of dollars see their jobs disappear, and Dalton McGuinty says that it's a success story?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would encourage the leader of the NDP to pick up the phone and talk to Buzz Hargrove. Talk to the CAW leaders at the GM plant in Windsor, and ask them for their take on the role that this government has played when it comes to securing new investment in the auto sector in the province of Ontario, because we've been working very closely with them. You might want to ask all those families that have benefited from these thousands of new jobs, whether it be the workers at the new Toyota assembly plant or the members of the CAW working at all the other plants that have expanded or been created as a result of our co-investment. You might want to ask them, because I get from his question that he feels we shouldn't be doing any of these kinds of investments, that we should leave those people, those workers and those families on their own. We're taking a different approach. We have a responsibility to work with those families, to work with the CAW and to work with the auto sector.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'll tell you what I think CAW workers see: They see General Motors getting a lot of money, they see Ford getting a lot of money, they see Chrysler getting a lot of money, and they see their jobs disappearing. If the Premier wants to claim credit for some non-union jobs appearing somewhere else, he can do that. But I think what those workers want to know is, how could the McGuinty government hand out hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money to multinational corporations and get no job guarantees for those workers in Windsor, those workers in Oshawa and those workers in St. Thomas? How could the McGuinty government hand out hundreds of millions of dollars and get no job guarantees for those workers who are losing their jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's a steady refrain coming from the leader of the NDP. I know he does really understand the issue. The choices here, as I see them, were either to proceed with this auto sector strategy—which we have, and we've pursued it aggressively and enjoyed some real successes on behalf of Ontario families and auto sector workers, landing over $7 billion worth of new investment and creating thousands of new jobs. That was choice number one. Choice number two was to do nothing.

They didn't support a single initiative that we made. They didn't support a single use of taxpayers' dollars to secure these new investments. They didn't support a single creation of a new job here in the province of Ontario. They didn't support any of that. They are bringing kind of a laissez-faire—it's surprising for the NDP—let the economy kind of wash across Ontario families and give up.

We're bringing a different approach. We think we have to roll up our sleeves and we have to work as hard as we can to secure new investment, and we're going to keep doing that.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think we're seeing the new McGuinty strategy: When you're caught, try to create confusion.

Let me be very clear, Premier. I'm in favour of an industrial hydro rate strategy that maintains reasonable, predictable, affordable industrial hydro rates for manufacturers. I support a refundable manufacturing investment tax: Where investments are made, a tax credit can be applied for. But what I don't support, Premier, is the McGuinty government handing out hundreds of millions of dollars to large corporations like General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, and at the same time workers who've worked 25, 30, 35 years in those plants are handed a pink slip and sent out the door.

Do you think that's a fair policy, Premier: to hand out hundreds of millions of dollars while workers who've basically given their working lives to those companies are sent out the door with no job?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can see I'm not going to convince my friend opposite of the perspective that I bring to this. Fortunately, I stand to be judged by Ontarians, and I think they've got a pretty fair perspective on all of this. I think they understand that what we've put in place is a plan, opposed by both opposition parties, to secure new investment. Yes, we have brought taxpayer

dollars to the table in order to secure that new investment and to create thousands of new jobs and to secure some existing jobs. It's not the kind of plan that enables us to secure guarantees with respect to existing investment. That's just not on. My friend opposite, in fairness to him, doesn't understand the competitive environment when it comes to what we're doing here in North America.

It's an aggressive plan, it has secured new investment, it has created thousands of new jobs, and it's the kind of plan that we will continue to pursue aggressively.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier and it has to do, again, with the letter from Chief Bill Montour of Six Nations council, which was addressed to Minister Bryant. What we've heard today is Minister Bryant effectively calling Chief Montour a liar. If you read the letter, the chief is essentially thanking the minister, on behalf of Six Nations, for his intervention in a police action. Your Attorney General has abdicated responsibility here today in terms of following up with an investigation of a very serious allegation that deals with obstruction of justice, Premier. I'm asking you if you will direct your Attorney General—clearly, he needs direction—to initiate a thorough investigation of this allegation.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Look at that. Not only is this an instance where suddenly the official opposition is interested in interference; the official opposition is now asking the Premier to interfere with the chief legal officer's discretion.

Again and again and again, we say, on this side of the House, that interference is not something that ought to take place. It has certainly been reinforced by the Ipperwash inquiry conclusions, and it's something that we abide by on this side of the House, unlike that side of the House.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess we're getting a little tired of the rhetoric from this minister in not dealing with the issue at hand.

Chief Montour has made a very serious accusation dealing with potential obstruction of justice. Your Attorney General is abdicating his responsibilities in the House today. Your Premier won't deal with the issue.

I'm asking you a straight-out question here, and try to answer it directly for a change: Are you calling Chief Montour a liar?

1110

Hon. Michael Bryant: I can tell you one thing: Chief Montour, if he were here right now, would say that you hold no brief for him and you have zero standing to stand up for his reputation and views. I can tell you, I have a relationship where I have discussions with Chief Montour. Tell me a single member of that caucus who has bothered to pick up the phone and try to establish a relationship with the chief of Six Nations. How many? Zero.

That is a caucus that, time after time, has tried to fan the flames. This is a government that will continue to seek not only the recommendations of the Ipperwash commission but will continue to ensure that there is zero interference with police operations. We will continue an aggressive, determined effort to try and resolve these issues in a peaceful fashion.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and it goes like this: Why has the McGuinty government driven a desperate parent to stage a hunger strike over the lack of publicly funded treatment for children with autism? And why has her government taken so long to clear the waiting list of over 1,500 children in this province? The question is very basic: When is this waiting list going to be cleared?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me start by saying that I have met with Mr. Marinoiu twice in the last several days. I met with him on the front lawn of Queen's Park and then I met him in my office. I can assure you that my ministry staff are working hard with him and his family to make sure that that he is getting all of the supports that his family is entitled to.

I can tell you that I understand how important it is to him and to all parents who have children with autism that we continue to improve services for children with autism. I am absolutely committed to improving services for children with autism. The work that has been done by parents from all parts of the province on this issue continues to encourage us in our work to improve services for children with autism in this province.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister knows that the reality is that the wait list in Ontario keeps on growing. Parents don't feel that their services are being improved at all. Stefan Marinoiu's hunger strike is a drastic action directly related to the fact that these parents don't think that services are improving in Ontario. Parents came from all over the province today to send this government a message that this life-and-death action that Stefan is taking is something they're here to support, because they need some action on this file and they need it now. Their children are languishing on waiting lists in Ontario. They're not getting the IBI, the intervention and the treatment that they need and deserve in this province. The government is indifferent to their needs.

After half a decade, why is nothing happening? Why is the McGuinty government not providing treatment for all of the children and all of the adequate supports that are required for their families?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To suggest that nothing has been done is simply not accurate. Let's take a look at what we have done. Since we were elected, we have more than tripled the funding for IBI. We have almost tripled the number of children receiving IBI services. Ten

years ago, the budget for autism services in this province was half a million dollars; today it's over $150 million. Ten years ago, no children in this province received IBI therapy; today over 1,400 children are receiving IBI therapy.

Do we still have work to do? Absolutely. Is our next step making schools a welcoming place for children with autism? Absolutely.

I will tell you what I told Mr. Marinoiu, and that is this: We are working as hard as we can. I urge him to stop his hunger strike, go back to his family—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GRASSY NARROWS FIRST NATION

Mr. David Orazietti: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. While our government has always been committed to forging a positive relationship with the First Nations people of Ontario, it sometimes comes with challenges. There are ongoing discussions with First Nations leaders in different areas of the province that have brought forth diverging views based on differences in culture, values and history.

This week, a group of young people on a peaceful march from the Grassy Narrows First Nation came through my riding of Sault Ste. Marie as they journeyed to Toronto on foot to bring attention to environmental issues and forestry issues.

Grassy Narrows First Nation has been operating a long-standing blockade over concern that their traditional territory is being adversely affected by logging. Minister, can you tell us what steps you're taking to address the concerns of the Grassy Narrows First Nations community?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to thank the member for the question. I did travel to Grassy Narrows First Nations yesterday to meet with Chief Fobister, his council and the elders, to talk about how we can move on. I was pleased to sign a memorandum of understanding on how we can continue to further our discussions.

There was a difference of perspective and views dealing with logging and land development and economic development in the Whiskey Jack Forest, so we were able to hire the Honourable Mr. Iacobucci, who came in and worked with the Ministry of Natural Resources staff, worked with the First Nations' elders and community, and came up with this understanding on how we could finally move forward to the benefit of everyone, recognizing that we both have views that need to be presented and dealt with on the table.

An absolutely wonderful opportunity: I was thrilled with the template and pleased with the elders and the chief for their active engagement on this front, knowing that it will make a significant difference as we move forward on the Whiskey Jack Forest.

Mr. David Orazietti: Minister, we certainly appreciate the work that you've been doing in regard. It's a positive step in the right direction. However, I'd be interested in hearing, as I'm sure all members of the House would, more details on the specifics of this agreement.

Through the blockade of forestry access roads in the Whiskey Jack Forest, Grassy Narrows First Nation has been demanding an end to all logging in their traditional territory. While we all understand the cultural differences behind these demands, it cannot be denied that the forestry industry is also facing some challenging times.

Minister, can you outline for us what this agreement will mean for the local economy and for the forestry companies in the area?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: The discussions with Grassy Narrows First Nation were based on achieving a better relationship on both sides and a better understanding. So it's important for us to acknowledge the traditions and where they come from. It is equally important for them to try and understand our values and goals in sustainable development.

Our aim through this process is to assist in better communication. To this end, the two main components of the agreement involved economic opportunities to increase the participation of First Nations in the forest economy. We're going to launch a pilot project to develop ways we can integrate Grassy Narrows' traditional uses with forest management activities.

This is important because it sets the template for how we can work with other First Nations as we're dealing with those challenges, ensuring that there is active participation and economic benefit, ensuring we understand their cultural differences and traditions and that, in fact, they understand ours. It's only by sitting down and talking to each other that we can truly make a difference.

C. DIFFICILE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. He's not here right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): He's here. Please proceed.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: He's here; great.

I would say to the minister, you have been missing in action. As a result, Ontario's Ombudsman, André Marin, has been forced to step into the void. He says that the deaths of 62 patients from a deadly superbug is a "human tragedy" crying out for investigation, which you didn't undertake. He also says that your attitude, that of the government, has been cavalier and lax.

I say to you today, Minister, will you immediately launch a province-wide investigation into C. difficile outbreaks in our hospitals and require the hospitals to begin immediate reporting?

Hon. George Smitherman: I'd have to give my honourable friend credit for a good line. I do apologize that I wasn't in the House as she began her question.

Over the last several years, we've been working to enhance the capacity of our hospitals, and health care overall, to deal with the challenges related to infectious disease. We've put infectious disease practitioners into environments, including two at the hospital in question, and initiated a hand-hygiene regime sponsored by the

World Health Organization. We formed a provincial infectious disease advisory committee to give us high-level advice, created 14 infection control networks across the breadth of the province, and we more than doubled provincial public health funding. Given that public health units play an important role in leadership on infectious disease, we've really sought to enhance capacities.

1120

The honourable member talks about the reporting of C. difficile numbers. As I've indicated in this House, it's certainly our intention to move forward with reporting on that and on a broad range of health care indicators.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Unfortunately, the minister has been missing in action. Do you realize, Minister, that more people have died from C. difficile than ever died from SARS? You seem unable to grasp the seriousness of this infection and also to recognize that it is preventable. So I say to you again: Will you take action and not put further lives at risk, such as 62 at Joseph Brant, 18 at the Sault Ste. Marie hospital, 18 in Barrie and 18 at Trillium Health Centre, and will you—I ask you again—immediately launch a province-wide investigation into these outbreaks in our hospitals and, secondly, begin immediate monthly reporting?

Hon. George Smitherman: I understand that it would be the opinion of the honourable member to do those things now. As I mentioned, we've taken very substantive initiatives, but nobody should pretend that the challenges associated with C. difficile aren't very serious challenges. It's not like this is the first time that these issues have become known. That's why vigilance in our hospital environment and on the part of those people working there and those people visiting there is absolutely necessary.

With respect to the mandatory reporting of C. difficile, I've already said to this House that it is our intention to move forward with reporting on that and on a broader array of indicators. We'll be depending on the work that has already been done, including a coroner's investigation into circumstances in Sault Ste. Marie. This gives us the go-forward and all the information we need to enhance our capacity to address these things. That's why we're moving forward and taking action on these matters, not subjecting ourselves to further review.

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Labour. While the chair of the WSIB spends the board's budget lavishly wining and dining his friends at expensive receptions, his board is on a path to ruin the lives of injured workers across Ontario—workers who would be glad to have that money to buy a decent week's worth of groceries for their families. When will this minister rein in his WSIB chair and direct him to get down to work to fix serious problems such as the experience rating program?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for asking the question because it gives me a chance to report back to the Legislature that I have had an opportunity to speak with the chair. The chair has provided me with a letter outlining the details of the reception that was held in Ottawa. I can clarify that the chair did follow the enhanced accountability mechanisms that this government brought in, which apply right throughout the organization and in particular to the chair and the board of directors. But I can also say that I advised the chair that while he did follow the rules and had good intent with regard to this reception and good reason to be there to speak to the MPs, it's important that all civil servants in our government take direction from this government in being very careful with what they do, to ensure that the perception of others is taken into consideration.

Mr. Paul Miller: The WSIB hands out millions of dollars in experience ratings to employers who have harassed their injured workers not to make claims, to abandon their claims or to come back to work before they're ready. The same board hounds injured workers, threatens to cut them off from their meagre benefits and drives many to the point of extreme stress-related illnesses.

It's time that the minister stood up for Ontario's injured workers. He can do that by demanding Steve Mahoney's resignation or by firing him. Which will it be and when will it be?

Hon. Brad Duguid: As I said earlier, I received a letter yesterday from Mr. Mahoney regarding this particular reception that was raised yesterday here in this Legislature. Mr. Mahoney was in Ottawa to speak to MPs with a request that federal institutions lower the flag on the day of mourning. I think that was a good reason for him to be there. Secondly, he was there to talk to the federal government about amending the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to ensure that our WSIB and workers' compensation boards across the provinces get better priority when it comes to bankruptcies. Again, he had a good reason to be there. He outlined in his letter that there were MPs there from all parties. The total cost of the reception was $831. Any alcohol was paid for by himself. A dinner held afterwards was paid for by himself. He fulfilled all the duties that a chair needs to fulfill in terms of the expenses for this particular reception.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. My riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry is a place where communities are taking positive action to better the lives of our local youth and young people. You had an excellent opportunity to see this first-hand during your recent visit to the city of Cornwall. Through visits to facilities like the Early Years centre, Laurencrest youth residence, and the Boys and Girls Club of Cornwall/SDG, you were able to experience the good work being done by area organizations. The men and women who dedicate their lives to our children are deserving of the support of the provincial government. What is our government doing to assist these organizations in their important work?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I was very pleased to be able to visit Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry late last month to see their terrific programs for children and youth in action. I was also able to see their terrific MPP in action, which was a tremendous experience as well. The Ontario Early Years Centres of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry is a terrific facility that offers services for children aged zero to six, in both English and French. Services include early learning, literacy programs for parents and their kids, training for new parents, toy and resource lending libraries for parents and caregivers, and information about other Early Years programs in the community. We're happy to support this program with $714,000 in annual funding.

Laurencrest Youth Services was another facility I was able to visit, a great example of how we're providing youth in conflict with the law the opportunity to achieve their full—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Jim Brownell: As MPP, I have always encouraged ministers of this government to come and experience the triumphs and challenges we face in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry first-hand. This serves to keep them informed of the projects going on in the community, and it also provides important opportunities for those ministers to share useful knowledge with my constituents.

Minister, during our visit to the community of Akwesasne, you informed the director of their community and social services about a program called Kanawayhitowin. Could the minister elaborate on this program and how we can benefit the women in the community of Akwesasne?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: While I was in Cornwall, I did meet with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, which was a very interesting morning for me. Interestingly, only a few days earlier, I was joined by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs at the launch of Kanawayhitowin, which is the aboriginal version of the neighbours, friends and families program. It is aimed at reducing domestic violence and was created in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. This campaign is made possible through a grant of $476,000 from our government. I was very happy to inform Maggie Terrance, who is the director of community and social services at Akwesasne, about the program, but even happier to read just a few days later that they're moving forward with implementing Kanawayhitowin in the community of Akwesasne. The program provides training for 100 community workers, television and radio advertising, a tool kit website—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy. During last Thursday's question period, the minister carefully avoided answering the question with regard to his party's increasing the use of coal at Dofasco and financing the increased use of coal, perhaps he didn't understand the issue. What he did do, though, was make the claim that his government was continuing to reduce the use of coal for electricity generation. That is in fact completely wrong.

OPG's annual report states that generation from coal increased by 16% in 2007. Not knowing what's going on at Dofasco is one thing, but giving wrong information about what's going on at OPG is quite another. Would the minister now wish to correct the discrepancy between his statements and the facts?

1130

Hon. Gerry Phillips: What I indicated last Thursday was that we, this government, are determined and committed to eliminating the use of coal for the production of electricity by 2014. I indicated to the Legislature that in 2011 we will cut it by an additional one third. I indicated to the Legislature that the way we will be able to do that is we are bringing on stream increased capacity, which is true. We're going to, in the next 18 months, bring on more capacity than in any other 18-month period in the history of Ontario.

We are reducing the use of coal. I think the first four months of this year were down dramatically. It is true; last year, 2007, the use of coal did go up; 2006, down dramatically, 2007, temporarily up because we had to bring on additional capacity. But I repeat to the people of Ontario: We are committed, in 2011—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: More promises. The minister can spin the coal business any way he wants, but the facts speak for themselves. OPG's own numbers show that they're up 16%—not temporarily, not a little bit—in 2007. In fact, Nanticoke's output reached its highest level since their party read their now-discredited and completely false coal promise to power in 2003. The use of coal accounted for almost 27% of OPG's total output in 2007; that's up from just over 23% in 2006. The numbers don't lie. Under his government, Ontarians are getting more power from coal.

I'd ask the minister to stop pretending that the use of coal is down in this province. It is up, way up. Admit that your coal promise is a sham and apologize for misinforming this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment, please—the final comment that you made.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please withdraw the comment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What can you say? I withdraw. I don't apologize.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I repeat what I said earlier. The government is committed to reducing the production of electricity through coal. In the first four months of this year, it's down dramatically. We are committed: 2011,

two years from now, a further one-third reduction. We cut the use of coal by one third over 2003 to 2006. We're going to cut an additional one third in 2011 and completely eliminate it in 2014. We will do that. It is absolutely no secret. Those numbers have been public for some time—2007, temporarily up; down dramatically in 2003. In 2011, we will cut it another third, and completely out by 2014. That is good news for the health of the people of Ontario. We are able to do that because we are making dramatic progress on increasing the production of electricity through things like renewables and conservation. So: one-third reduction in 2011, and completely out by 2014.

PUBLIC HEALTH

M^me^ France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Now that four days have passed, can the minister tell this assembly who ordered the VIA train to be quarantined in Foleyet last Friday?

Hon. George Smitherman: I thank the honourable member for the question. I had a chance to speak to her yesterday afternoon. I can pass the supplementary to my colleague the Minister of Community Safety.

There was no official quarantine of the train, but the OPP, in the investigation of a death that had occurred on the train, secured the train. That put in place the measures which contained all individuals until such time as a wide array of experts—medical and otherwise—had the chance to assess the circumstances and determine—with the bias at all times being on the safety of the people of Ontario. Accordingly, as I had a chance to say yesterday, we're very encouraged by the capacity for response across a wide array of players, and we think that they acted at all times with prudence towards the safety and protection with the people of Ontario.

M^me^ France Gélinas: If a quarantine order was never issued in the first place, why is the minister only revealing this information now? The minister should have clarified way before now what had happened in Foleyet last Friday.

Seven hours after the fact, there was a press conference at Queen's Park, where the chief medical officer of health should have clarified what had happened. But none of that happened. Why did the minister pretend for four days that a train had been quarantined, when in fact that was never the case?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do think the honourable member is splitting hairs about a circumstance. I think very strongly that that's what she's doing.

The media attached the word "quarantine," because they saw an action which had the effect of securing individuals in a contained environment so as to make sure that they did not spread an infectious disease. Instead of acknowledging the superiority of action on the part of front-line health care workers and front-line people like EMS and police, the honourable member seeks to find these points of distinction.

Indeed, it would have been preferable if, on Friday afternoon, in a news conference that was designed to provide good-quality information, the chief medical officer of health had provided that information. I agree with the honourable member. I thanked her yesterday for raising the question. I spoke to her personally about the matter. I sent her an e-mail. But at the heart of the matter, the handling of this by front-line workers—EMS, police service and front-line health care workers—was superior and sought at all times to protect the people of the province—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Member from Huron–Bruce.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. The opposition has made a very serious allegation about directing the OPP. Can you please state clearly for this House whether this government ever directed the OPP? What has Commissioner Fantino said about this allegation?

Hon. Michael Bryant: In a published letter to the editor, OPP Commissioner Fantino wrote: "At no time during this event"—referring to the blocking of Highway 6—"or in relation to any police operation did anyone in government or elsewhere tell the OPP to stand down or direct the actions of the OPP.

"The decisions that resulted in the peaceful resolution of the road closure in Caledonia were based on ongoing dialogue between the OPP and Six Nations leaderships...."

Obviously, we're very supportive of the OPP actions. It is, I think, very helpful for the chief commissioner to have clarified that in a letter to the editor, which is obviously consistent with the information that I and others have provided to this House. I hope this resolves the matter.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: There will be no supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I feel that the minister has answered my question quite clearly.

ONTARIO SECURITIES COMMISSION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. In 2004, the finance committee reviewed the Securities Act and unanimously made 15 recommendations. One of those was to separate the adjudicative and investigative functions of the Ontario Securities Commission. This would address the commission's inherent conflict of interest, which has continued to exist for the last four years in spite of hundreds and hundreds of cases being turned over to it. Why has this minister not acted on this very important recommendation, given four years and the hundreds of cases that have been referred to it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I believe you said that you were referring to the Ontario Securities Commission. I apologize; I couldn't hear your question clearly because Mr. Bisson was here speaking to my colleagues.

Both myself and the Attorney General in our various capacities have been involved in this issue. As you know, the attorneys general of Canada have been meeting to discuss these issues.

An important part, too, of enforcement on the security side would be a single common regulator in Canada, which is our government's principal objective. While there are challenges in the enforcement of securities, I'm pleased with the progress to date that the Attorney General's been involved in, as have other attorneys general in Canada, while for our part at the Ministry of Finance we continue to press the case for a single common securities regulator. I believe both those actions, taken together, will afford capital markets and investors here in Ontario greater confidence in the enforceability of securities legislation.

1140

Mr. Michael Prue: Nobody denies the role of a single regulator, nobody denies that, but in the meantime, for four years thousands upon thousands of people have lost investment and hundreds upon hundreds of actions have been requested of the Ontario Securities Commission.

Another recommendation that the finance committee also made was to establish a task force to review self-regulating organizations. Self-regulating organizations advocate on behalf of members as trade associations and take enforcement action against members if they break the rules. This too is a conflict of interest which the all-party committee said should be resolved four years ago.

Minister, four years have passed. Why has this minister not acted on these recommendations?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: First of all, let's review some of the things that have happened. Investors now have the right to sue for misleading secondary market disclosures. There are clear Securities Act offences for market manipulation and fraud and misrepresentation, stronger deterrents to wrongdoing through increased maximum court fines and prison terms. The OSC itself has new powers to enforce. The Attorney General has been working with his colleagues.

I'll say this to investors in Ontario. Ontario remains a great place to invest. We have an open and transparent securities market. We are working to make it better all the time. We will continue to co-operate with other enforcing jurisdictions throughout Canada. But let me reinforce, this government remains committed to a single, common securities regulator in Canada. No step will provide for greater investor security than that. No step will provide for greater stability of capital markets than that.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. With summer quickly approaching and the school year almost over, families across Ontario are planning their summer vacations. Whether it's a quick sound bite on the radio, pop-ups on the Internet or full-page ads in local newspapers, my constituents and Ontarians alike are bombarded at this time of year with information about vacation clubs. Unfortunately, I and other members have heard stories of Ontarians losing money with some vacation clubs out there. I'm also aware that some vacation clubs also engage in false advertising in order to lure consumers.

Springtime is also the time that some consumers succumb to the high-pressure sales tactics often associated with the sale of time-shares. I'm concerned with the lack of protection for Ontario's travellers.

Minister, what is the government doing to protect Ontario's consumers?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to answer the question from my honourable friend, who I know has had a concern in this area for some time, and I answer it as the owner of a vacation club membership and also the owner of three different time-shares. I, like many of you, have been subject to some of that kind of pressure out there where you get $55 and dinner if you attend the high-pressure sales pitch.

In response to that, I say to the honourable member, our government has put provisions in place under the Consumer Protection Act that allow consumers the right to cancel an agreement within one year if goods or services have been misrepresented, and to cancel a time-share or vacation club contract without any reason up to 10 days after receiving a copy of the agreement and a right to that refund when—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Thanks to the McGuinty government's $10-million investment into the "There's no place like this" campaign, which encouraged Ontarians to vacation in our own backyard, and our $4-million investment into the Celebrate Ontario 2008 initiative, millions of Ontarians will be spending their vacation right here in Ontario.

Unfortunately, Ontario travellers are not immune to the threat of identity theft when they travel. We've heard stories about individuals losing credit cards when they are travelling and the surprising charges that sometimes accumulate on those cards if they fall into the wrong hands. We've also heard stories about individuals losing key pieces of government identification while on vacation and, unfortunately, these documents are sometimes used fraudulently.

The minister, in his previous answer, talked about the Consumer Protection Act and how it protects Ontarians from unscrupulous time-share and vacation clubs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to provide assurance to the House that the McGuinty government is certainly working hard to make sure Ontarians are protected from the threat of identity theft. It's an important issue.

We've taken a number of steps to better protect Ontarians from this situation. We're supporting academic research that identifies identity theft through the Ontario

Research Network for Electronic Commerce. We're also working hard with other provinces to develop educational approaches and common legislative reform, not only to combat identity theft but also to help consumers who have had their identities stolen. We distribute the Smart Consumer calendars every year. I always order several hundred for my riding because they're so popular, particularly with seniors who seem so often to be the victims of these kinds—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Time and time again, this government says that education is its key priority. My question is to the Minister of Education. You were unavailable the day after the trustee issue broke, and the response from your staff to questions asked about questionable expenses has been, "If the trustees say it's an expense, then it is an expense." This is unacceptable to me and it's unacceptable to taxpayers in Ontario.

Minister, why have the trustees' expenses ballooned unchecked under your watch?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I was in the House the day that the report was released and I answered questions accurately. Actually, the day after the report was released I was in Sault Ste. Marie visiting schools, which is part of my job as the Minister of Education.

What I have said is that the behaviours that have taken place at the Toronto Catholic District School Board are inappropriate; they're unacceptable. I have asked that the trustees at the Toronto Catholic District School Board bring a plan to me by May 21 to implement the recommendations that Mr. Hartmann has put in place. There has been an auditor sent in to look at any other questionable expenses. I look forward to seeing that plan by May 21.

The behaviours are intolerable. We have said that our government will not tolerate the use of public money for private advantage.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our spiritual and parliamentary tradition since it was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and"

Whereas the Speaker has received thousands of phone calls on this very issue; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my name in full support.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) chief Donny Morris, deputy chief Jack McKay, councillors Cecilia Begg, Samuel McKay, Darryl Sainnawap, and band member Bruce Sakakeep are imprisoned for merely protecting their land;

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government failed to consult KI before giving Platinex a mining permit on KI's traditional land that is currently under a land claim;

"Whereas the jailing of aboriginal leaders who disagree with the government is something you might see in a Third World dictatorship and not in Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately release the KI Six, remove the mining permit from KI lands and engage in proper consultation and accommodation with Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation."

This has been signed by many residents of the riding of Kenora–Rainy River and I have affixed my signature as well.

1150

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition sent to me by Dr. Tom Short and his patients of Mississauga. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to support and sign this petition, and to ask page Naomi to carry it for me.

ANTI-TOBACCO LEGISLATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition from the Rockford service centre in my riding:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

Whereas the Liberal government recently passed the Smoke-Free Ontario Act; and

"Whereas the act prohibits sale and supply of tobacco to a person who is less than 19 years old; and

"Whereas the Tobacco Tax Act requires that a tobacco tax rate of 11.1 cents applies to every cigarette and on every gram or part gram of tobacco sold in Ontario;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that the two acts be enforced on all retailers in Ontario who sell, offer for sale or store tobacco."

I have signed this.

SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

M^me^ France Gélinas: J'ai une pétition pour l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario.

« Attendu que la pénurie du personnel des foyers de soins en Ontario est un grave problème donnant lieu à des soins inadéquats pour les résidents et des conditions peu sécuritaires pour le personnel; et

« Attendu que le gouvernement Harris a éliminé le règlement du niveau minimum en 1995 et que, par la suite, le nombre d'heures de soins a baissé en-dessous du minimum précédent de 2,25 heures par jour; et

« Attendu que, malgré les améliorations récentes, le nombre moyen d'heures de soins est toujours insuffisant, qu'il varie d'un foyer à l'autre et qu'il n'est pas précisé selon des normes bien établies; et

« Attendu que, présentement il n'existe aucune disposition de la loi pour protéger ni les résidents, ni le personnel contre les coupures budgétaires que le gouvernement pourrait entamer dans l'avenir; et

« Attendu que la nécessité de soins s'accroît sans cesse, étant donné la population vieillissante et le passage augmenté des personnes âgées ou malades des hôpitaux aux foyers de soins de longue durée;

« Nous, soussignés, présentons la pétition suivante à l'Assemblée législature de l'Ontario :

« Nous faisons appel au gouvernement de l'Ontario d'ajouter immédiatement des normes minimales de 3,5 heures de soins personnels par résident par jour aux dispositions de la nouvelle Loi sur les foyers de soins de longue durée, et d'assurer le financement de ces soins personnels dans les foyers de soins de longue durée. »

Je suis en accord avec cette pétition. Je vais la signer et la remettre à la page Joanna.

ALMA COLLEGE

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I have a petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas historic Alma College, designed in the High Victorian Gothic style, chartered by an act of Ontario passed March 2, 1877, opened in October 1881, located in the city of St. Thomas, county of Elgin, province of Ontario, has fallen into a dire state of disrepair; and

"Whereas Alma College continues to be threatened with demolition by its current owners despite the efforts of many concerned citizens, alumni and various officials; and

"Whereas a historical plaque commemorating Alma College was unveiled at the college on Thursday, October 28, 1976, by the Ontario Heritage Trust, an agency within the Ministry of Culture and Recreation; and

"Whereas the city of St. Thomas designated Alma College under part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act (bylaw 167-94), in 1994; and

"Whereas recent amendments (2005) to the Ontario Heritage Act allow the Minister of Culture to designate property as being provincially significant;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Culture immediately designate Alma College as a building of provincial significance and, in the event of a demolition order being issued for Alma, to immediately intervene by issue of a stop order, and to further identify provincial partnerships and possible funding to protect the existing buildings from further deterioration while financial resources are generated to restore the property to its former glory."

I attach my signature to this one as well.

ALMA COLLEGE

Mrs. Julia Munro: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas historic Alma College, designed in the High Victorian Gothic style, chartered by an act of Ontario passed March 2, 1877, opened in October 1881, located in the city of St. Thomas, county of Elgin, province of Ontario, has fallen into a dire state of disrepair; and

"Whereas Alma College continues to be threatened with demolition by its current owners despite the efforts of many concerned citizens, alumni and various officials; and

"Whereas a historical plaque commemorating Alma College was unveiled at the college on Thursday, October 28, 1976, by the Ontario Heritage Trust, an agency within the Ministry of Culture and Recreation; and

"Whereas the city of St. Thomas designated Alma College under part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act (bylaw 167-94), in 1994; and

"Whereas recent amendments (2005) to the Ontario Heritage Act allow the Minister of Culture to designate property as being provincially significant;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Culture immediately designate Alma College as a building of provincial significance and, in the event of a demolition order being issued for Alma, to immediately intervene by issue of a stop order, and to further identify provincial partnerships and possible funding to protect the existing buildings from further deterioration while financial resources are generated to restore the property to its former glory."

I've affixed my signature since I'm in favour of this.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas part-time college workers in Ontario have been waiting for 30 years for bargaining rights; and

"Whereas thousands of part-time college workers have signed OPSEU cards, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board failed to order a timely representation vote; and

"Whereas the Ontario government must immediately make good on its promise to extend bargaining rights to college part-timers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The McGuinty government must immediately pass legislation legalizing the rights of college part-timers to organize, and direct the colleges to immediately recognize OPSEU as the bargaining agent for part-time college workers."

I support this petition and I'm signing it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I have a petition here to the Ontario Legislative Assembly of Ontario on the western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I send this to you via page Adam.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. John O'Toole: I have a petition from my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Uxbridge hospital is struggling to keep its emergency room open past the October provincial election; and

"Whereas the community of Uxbridge fears losing its emergency and other health services at its local hospital as health services are rationalized and restructured across the province" under the LHINs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure the provincial government creates a comprehensive and clear plan to make sure small hospitals remain vibrant providers of a range of services, including fully staffed emergency rooms; and

"To ensure that no other smaller or rural community faces the loss of local emergency services or any other services under this or any other provincial restructuring of health services."

I'm pleased to sign and support this for my community of Uxbridge and present it to Hannah, one of the pages here at the Legislative Assembly.

1200

LONG-TERM CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have another 5,000 names for a petition about minimum standards of care in nursing homes.

"Whereas understaffing in Ontario's nursing homes is a serious problem resulting in inadequate care for residents and unsafe conditions for staff;

"Whereas after the Harris government removed the regulations providing minimum care levels in 1995, hours of care dropped below the previous 2.25 hour/day minimum;

"Whereas the recent improvements in hours of care are not adequate, vary widely and are not held to accountable standards;

"Whereas there is currently nothing in legislation to protect residents and staff from renewed cuts to care levels by future governments; and

"Whereas care needs have measurably increased with aging and the movement of people with more complex health needs from hospitals into long-term-care homes;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Immediately enact and fund an average care standard of 3.5 hours per resident per day in the regulations under the new Long-Term Care Homes Act."

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it with page Naomi.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Charles Sousa: It's a pleasure that I read a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Western Mississauga Ambulatory Surgery Centre

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I affix my signature and provide it to Sheilagh.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: A petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

As I agree with the petition, I affix my name thereto.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for petitions has expired. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1203 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Ted Arnott: Ontario's economic heartland, our manufacturing base in southern Ontario, is in very serious trouble, thanks in no small part to the McGuinty Liberal government's economic negligence. The more than 100 people who were laid off yesterday at Skyjack, a Guelph-based subsidiary of Linamar Corp., know all too well that there is a problem. The people of Windsor know all too well that there is a problem: They are set to lose another 1,400 jobs, on top of the thousands that have already left the city, when the GM transmission plant closes in two years.

In the month of April alone, 15,000 manufacturing jobs—15,000—disappeared in Ontario. That brings the total to more than 207,000 manufacturing jobs lost since July 2004.

Everyone seems to know that we have a very serious economic problem—everyone, that is, except the high-taxing, over-regulating McGuinty government. For three years now I have persistently and repeatedly called on the finance committee to hold hearings on the economic competitiveness of our manufacturing sector. When will this Premier finally get involved and instruct the Liberal MPP who chairs this committee to commence hearings immediately? When will he take this basic and constructive step to stop the haemorrhaging of our manufacturing jobs?

This Premier must find it within himself to provide leadership on this issue. Too many families have already paid too high a price for his government's economic negligence. I call upon the Premier to act immediately.

BUS TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: This past Saturday, I had the opportunity to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Langs Bus Lines Limited, which is headquartered in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Over 700 people from all over southwestern Ontario attended this event in Strathroy. Nothing was spared as Langs celebrated this milestone with their drivers, families and friends.

Like any family business, Langs started small, with a modest four buses running out of what is now their head office in Strathroy. Slowly but surely, the business grew larger and larger, until today, when Langs operates terminals in London, Nairn, Norwich, Sarnia, Watford and Forest.

School buses are especially vital in rural areas because of the long distances between rural homes and the local schools. A school bus operator is often the first person a child sees after leaving home in the morning on their way to school and the last person they see as they come home. I am sure that many of us in the Legislature, and those watching on television today, can remember our school bus drivers and understand the importance of safe transportation of our children from home to school and back home again.

I want to congratulate and say thank you to Langs Bus Lines Limited, to Doug Lang and his son Kevin, and to all the school bus lines and operators for all that they do for our rural students in Ontario.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Once again, the McGuinty government is sending out money without having a plan. They did it on the economy and now they're doing it in agriculture.

The Minister of Agriculture recently said to all the farmers in Ontario "that when there is immediate need, we are there for them." But her own program—the cattle, hog and horticulture payment—leaves out young, expanding farmers and others who need support, like the Veyhofs, who are struggling to feed their children and hold on to their farm while their neighbour, who sold his pigs two years ago, received $80,000 to feed them; expanding farmers like the greenhouse in Leamington, who got only a fraction of what they were expecting because their expansion wasn't used in the calculations; people who didn't apply for assistance under the federal program but needed this program, like the beef farmer in northern Ontario; operations like the one in Durham region that fed 7,000 hogs in 2007 but didn't qualify. They were all missed by this program, and the minister designed the program so that there's no appeal. All decisions are final.

It seems that expediency is more important to this government than fairness. How do you explain to these farmers that the government doesn't think they deserve help?

The farmers told the minister that there was a problem with the program, our party told her there was a problem with the program before she sent out the cheques, and I've told her repeatedly in this Legislature that there was a problem. The minister owes the farmers an apology for her statement and she needs to do something now to ensure that the government is really there for all the farmers.

FIREFIGHTERS' MEMORIAL

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I had a prepared member's statement, but I've decided that I'm not going to read it today.

As you all know, I've just received some very disturbing information about something that occurred not too far from here, just down the road at the firefighters' memorial, which apparently was severely defaced by someone overnight and was laden with a bunch of graffiti and negative messages. People are very upset about it. I bumped into Brian George just a couple of minutes ago, and he's pretty upset and taken aback.

I think all of the members in this Legislature should be aware that this has happened. I think we would all, equally, condemn wholeheartedly any actions at all that would deface a monument to some of the heroes that come from every single community across this province. It is highly inappropriate, it is highly disturbing, and it is absolutely disgraceful that the monument that is put up to acknowledge and recognize that firefighters give their lives—literally, on too many occasions—to help the people of our communities in times of need, when there are fires and other disasters occurring—that's what that memorial is supposed to be about. It's supposed to be a positive message: The province—all of us—are telling firefighters how much we value them. To deface it is a despicable act, and I'm sure we would all agree that we condemn it wholeheartedly.

CHILD CARE CENTRES

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Yesterday, I attended the official opening of London's new Salvation Army daycare centre in my riding of London–Fanshawe. This wonderful centre was made possible by our government's commitment to invest in children and increase the number of child care spaces for the hardworking families of London.

Last spring, the Salvation Army received funding from our government to build this wonderful child care centre, which our Premier came to announce and to break ground for, for construction. I think it was a very important commitment, because many people from the Salvation Army, many majors and two commissioners, came for this announcement. Also, many members from our community and city councillors from the city departments of social welfare came to celebrate this event, because it meant a lot to the whole community.

Before I finish my time, I want to also echo my colleague the member from Hamilton Centre and condemn, on behalf of my colleagues who don't have time to speak—because I think firefighters do an excellent job in our community. They deserve all of our respect and support. I support what the member said and all of us should condemn these actions. I am going to phone Mr. Brian George and express my regret about what happened. We should deal with this issue in a professional manner, and all of us should show support to the firefighters for the great job they do on behalf of all of us.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. John O'Toole: Two weeks ago, we learned of the loss of 900 jobs at the General Motors plant in Oshawa, part of my community. Yesterday, we learned that the GM layoffs were, indeed, closing the Windsor transmission plant in two years.

Mr. Speaker, 200,000-plus jobs have been lost under the careful watch of the McGuinty government: 50,000 manufacturing jobs lost in the past 12 months alone, 15,000 jobs just in April, and 1,400 jobs yesterday. Where does it end? That's the question at the top of mind.

Ontario has the people, the skills, the energy and the innovation to compete with the very best in the world. What we lack is a government with a plan, a government that has any attempt at matching the innovation of the

people it serves and the energy of the people of Ontario. We lack a leader with a plan. We have a first-class work force and entrepreneurs—with a lower rating of government.

Even this morning, with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade in the estimates committee, we brought forward reports from Roger Martin and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce encouraging them to bring forward a plan. In fact, the minister was unable to answer many of the questions; no plan to let working Ontarians keep part of their money; no plan to cut red tape, as requested by the Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Judith Andrew and Len Crispino.

The government has added 102,000 people to the provincial payroll and brags about it. It ignores what's most important: the issues of jobs for the people of Ontario.

Where's the plan, Premier?

1510

POVERTY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Last Friday, I was honoured to host a poverty reduction round table in my riding of Ottawa Centre with the Minister of Children and Youth Services, Deb Matthews. Also joining us at this round table was Minister Madeleine Meilleur.

We were pleased to have a broad representation of both social service agencies and community members who came together to share their experiences. The participants were frank with us about their frustrations in navigating our system of supports, and they told us how difficult it can be to get out of the poverty cycle when incremental increases in income result in drastic reductions in the benefits received. I want to thank Minister Matthews for taking the time to meet with members of our community to discuss these important issues.

I want to urge every member of this chamber to organize round tables with their constituents to talk about how we can address the issue of poverty in our communities. This is not an exercise in politics and should not be made into a partisan issue. Poverty is a serious issue that affects every one of our communities. The only way to address poverty is to transcend party lines, roll up our sleeves and work together. Each and every member of this honourable chamber was elected to make their community a better place. Let's forget about politics for a minute and do what we were elected to do: protect the vulnerable and improve our communities for everyone. People first, politics later.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS CARNATION CAMPAIGN

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'm proud and honoured to rise today in support of the MS carnation campaign and to thank all members who have shown their support for people affected by multiple sclerosis by wearing a carnation today. Today, volunteers from the MS Society are at Queen's Park meeting with MPPs from each political party to raise awareness of MS and the society.

Medical research has shown that women are diagnosed with MS three times more often than men. Many Canadians living with multiple sclerosis are mothers, and many more adults and children are being diagnosed every day. That's why, every year, the MS carnation campaign takes place over Mother's Day weekend.

For 60 years, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada has provided hope and help for people with MS from across Canada—hope through their extensive national research program, and help through their services and support, which make life better for people with MS and their families today.

Please join the MS Society in making every day better for people living with MS and in working toward the day when we finally eradicate multiple sclerosis.

FIREFIGHTERS' MEMORIAL

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to add my voice today to those of the members from Hamilton Centre and London–Fanshawe about the terrible act of vandalism that took place overnight to the firefighters' memorial adjacent to Queen's Park.

I can't adequately express how seeing the graffiti and the paint scrawled across the front of the memorial actually made me feel. I was shocked and offended by what I saw, as I'm sure were the many people who stopped in their tracks, heading to work, when they saw what had happened there.

This government and, I'm sure, everyone in this House does not and will not tolerate such acts of vandalism and callous disregard for a memorial that is meant to honour fallen firefighters.

The memorial is meant to be one way each of us can show our respect and admiration for what firefighters do and for the sacrifices they make in order to keep all Ontarians safe. It's meant to serve as comfort to the families and friends of those fallen heroes that their loss is felt by everyone in the province and that their loved ones will not be forgotten.

I'd like to emphasize to all of our Ontario firefighters and their families that the terrible actions of these vandals bear no semblance to the utmost respect that we, all of us in this place, and Ontarians generally, have for their profession and for their commitment to our collective safety.

I can't begin to imagine what was going through the minds of those vandals as they committed this crime, but I do hope they are brought to justice for what they have done and express true remorse for their actions.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on

intended appointments dated May 13, 2008, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 107(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (SPEED-LIMITING SYSTEMS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (SYSTÈMES LIMITEURS DE VITESSE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 17, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 41, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in relation to the use of speed-limiting systems in commercial motor vehicles / Projet de loi 41, Loi modifiant le Code de la route relativement à l'utilisation de systèmes limiteurs de vitesse dans les véhicules utilitaires.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: There is always a time to rise and bring to the attention of the people of Ontario, and indeed to the Legislature, issues with respect to legislation that we all have a responsibility to understand: both the positives and the challenges.

The speed limiter bill has a bit of history, and I'm reminded, almost by the very name of it, of the Laurie Scott act. Laurie Scott, the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, brought this forward in good faith, I believe, on behalf of the OTA, the Ontario Trucking Association. On the surface, it sounds like a bill that we could get along with. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would imagine that in your riding there would be similar observations—the news stories of trucks challenging our roadways, shall we say, and that somehow or other we will solve all these problems by having these speed limiters where the trucks won't be able to exceed 105 kilometres per hour.

Initially when I looked at it, I thought that the bill makes very good sense. The only problem with it is the 105—when I look at the speedometer and I look at the road sign, it says "100 kilometres," and many provincial types of roadways are 90. What's this 105? Is it permission to break the law? The first ambiguous message is to say, "There's the sign, the Highway Traffic Act, and it's 100 kilometres per hour; and there's the bill saying you can go 105." I understand that under certain conditions, when you're passing, it gives you this five-kilometres-per-hour leeway to overtake. On a single roadway, like a two-lane highway, one in each direction, there could be little caravans building up, trucks unable to pass one another because they've got this governor on the vehicle that won't allow them to get out of harm's way or to avoid these convoys of trucks which some risky drivers may try to overtake. It may constitute a hazard.

In fact, passing on some hills in my riding of Durham, specifically on Highway 35/115 and 35 going to the city of Kawartha Lakes—there are portions of that where there are a lot of risky stretches, and these risky stretches are being exacerbated by this new bill.

I have the greatest respect for the current Minister of Transportation. That isn't the issue. He's a person whom I have the greatest respect for in the overall intent here to make our roads safer. We're all in favour of that. A more sophisticated debate would drive this up to a whole other level. The roadways were changed from miles per hour to kilometres—Mr. Speaker, you'd probably know this—and when you do the conversion from kilometres to miles per hour, I guess the roadways are actually designed for roughly 110 kilometres. Some of the people in MTO, when I was critic, told me—at least that's the impression I was left with—that that could be a decision made by persons who have the political courage to do just that, to do the right thing. That may help some of the challenges. If the roadways are so designed and it is strictly enforced, I believe that the 110 rule should prevail.

It has to be enforced. I don't mean this ambiguous message that we're only going to enforce—it's almost common knowledge. I shouldn't be saying this to the public as I am, but often, if you're in excess of 100 kilometres per hour on the 400-series highways, the general understanding is that they don't enforce this until it's 10 kilometres over. I hope I'm not surprising—maybe only members of the Legislature are of this understanding, or misunderstanding. My point is, "Post it, state it and enforce it." That's the issue here. But we've got, "Post it, send some other message of 105, and question when it's actually going to be enforced." I'd like the rules to apply equally across the board.

1520

Maybe I'm taking longer under the general rules of agreement here today than I should.

A secondary dimension of this bill: I'm quite familiar that Mr. David Bradley and the Ontario Trucking Association also have good intentions to regulate their driver education and driver training, which I agree with, and the ministry is following up. They have the direct ear of the minister on this. That's my impression.

Who is speaking up for the small independents, the small independent drover trying to hustle a few dollars, getting goods to market on time in off hours? What about truckers that are transcontinental, that are going in multi-jurisdictions, where they have a governor and they can't keep up with the traffic in other jurisdictions where this kind of legislation is not in place? Many of the truckers today are long-distance haulers. It's the only way many of the independents can make a living in this kind of society, under the current government. The way jobs are going and manufacturing itself is going south, it raises a very important question on the very economics of this issue. It's more red tape. Many of the independent truckers will now have to go in and perhaps get their

motor replaced; I don't know. But certainly having a governor installed is more expense—a tax, if you will.

Then there's the whole enforcement issue: the police. We've almost made the case now that maybe the general traffic flow—I commute pretty well every day, and the traffic flow is such that if you're not going 110 on the 400-series highways and you're in the inside lane, you'll get run over. If you're going less than 110 on the 401 going eastbound—or westbound, for that matter—you could be in serious trouble.

If we have all these trucks stacked up doing 105 and nobody can get by them, I don't know if this is going to work. It sounds good, but how are they going to enforce it? When the cars are going 110/120—and I don't see any police on the road to any great extent. We're coming up to a long weekend.

I think there are more important issues, quite honestly. I think that having a posted, enforceable speed on the 401 would be a good start. Having a system of licensing and testing would be a good start. Looking at my bill to ban the use of cell phones in certain areas on our highways would be a good start.

This bill is—by all accounts here, the base is going to collapse. Where's the substance?

Mr. Mike Colle: Yeah, where is the substance?

Mr. John O'Toole: Some might say, where's the substance of my remarks? However, I have an hour and 50 minutes left, for those viewing.

I say that what is needed is the allocation of more resources on the highways for stricter enforcement of the existing rules. That's the argument here. There's not a cent in this bill to make our roads safer. It's just that the minister, by decree, is going to make it safer for everyone in Ontario.

It's a troubling outcome when we're using up a whole day and all this legislative time when we have a bill that Laurie Scott introduced that would have got the job done, showing this democratic renewal at work by having an opposition member like Ms. Scott—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I would be supportive of that. If you're going to have a government bill, with all the resources and time that goes into it—I don't know; could we put something in here that's got some definite substance? We should have public hearings perhaps, to listen to the independent truckers. Public hearings would serve a useful purpose. I'm not sure. I'm looking at the minister to shake his head. Is it no? It's a yes. Well, we may have won some concessions already, it would seem. If we could just have some further concessions about looking at the cell phone bill, then we'd certainly be in support of this bill. We all work towards making our roads safer in the province of Ontario. That's the deal here.

I just want to put a voice there for the independent truckers I've spoken to when I was critic of that ministry. The independent truckers brought up some very salient and important questions, and I hope the minister during the public hearings will listen to those and modify the bill in such a way that it's enforceable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Further debate?

Mr. Bradley has moved second reading of Bill 41. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): So ordered.

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 7, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 44, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 44, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm surprised and privileged to have the opportunity this afternoon to respond to the omnibus bill of all time, Bill 44, the budget bill, which has several poison pills in it. The point that troubles me most is that there is a part of this which is the depreciation allowance. It's our idea. This is our territory, and we can support that. And there's a reduction in the capital tax. Who wouldn't support that? But there are things in here that would trouble my grandmother, who was the most loving, patient person.

I've learned here that when you get a budget bill where the only tax break in it—and I'm being lighthearted here this afternoon because they're going to time-allocate this bill, force it through and drive it in and we are going to have no say. They're not going to amend one thing in it. It's unbelievable, the thoughtlessness and the insensitivity, and yet there are things in this that we want to give voice to.

The tax credit for seniors is a good example of things that we agree with. On closer examination, what I noticed about that: This rebate for seniors on their property tax pretty well matches the money that the McGuinty government is taking out of their other pocket for the health tax that they whacked everybody who makes $16,000 with—this gives their money back. It's one way of letting some of the seniors—the CARP group and others, who are very upset with the amount of municipal tax that's been levied. Their energy is going up. Their property taxes are going up. Their insurance is going up. Food is going up. Heating their home is going up—their travel. Everything's going up, and they're going to give them

back a stipend, a token amount back in this budget. We support that. This isn't all negative messaging.

What troubles us is that for a government that has been told by Roger Martin and Len Crispino of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, a big conference—they said, "The two things you could do immediately to help the economy of Ontario are to cut red tape and reduce the tax burden."

1530

Now, why am I saying such things? Right now, we're in committee hearings. I should be down there now myself actually, and I hope that other people are going to take my place. There's a really important report, and I think some of the members might be happy to receive a copy. Call my office, any of the members on the government side, and I'll send you a copy. The government paid for this report. Here it is. The report is called Path to the 2020 Prosperity Agenda. It's actually a very good report, commissioned by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Ms. Pupatello.

You'd be amazed at the list of attendees on this committee. They're leaders. These are people who understand both the economy and the people of Ontario. For instance, there's Roger Martin. He's the chair of this prosperity committee commissioned by Dalton McGuinty. They paid them for it, and I think it cost them over $1 million for this report. But it appears—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member is saying to me that they didn't read it. I can't attest to that, but it would appear to me they haven't read it. It's troubling.

Now who are some of the other members on this committee? There's Jim Balsillie, who is the founder, and I guess the largest shareholder, of Research In Motion, RIM, which is an innovation company associated with the University of Waterloo and is a favourite stock now if you see it—trading over $100 and worldwide. And so, he is telling them. There's Jim Balsillie; there's Timothy Dattels from Newbridge Capital; Lisa de Wilde from TVO; David Folk from Jefferson Partners—Linda Jefferson might know who they are; Dr. Suzanne Fortier from Natural Science Engineering Research Council; Gordon Homer from Gordon J. Homer Advisory Services; David Johnston, president of the University of Waterloo; David Keddie from National Compressed Air; Mark Mullins from the Fraser Institute; Tim Penner, Proctor and Gamble president, PG Canada; and Daniel Trefler from the University of Toronto. These are a panel of experts convened for the purpose of giving Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan—the Premier and the minister—advice.

Here's the report. It's online. If people want a copy, call, because it's good reading. I'm just going to read a couple of little paragraphs. I've read the whole report, and that's why it's falling apart. I just opened it up the other day.

Taking prosperity to the next level, tackling 2020 prosperity: "As the Ontario government begins its new mandate"—this is page 1—"it has a great opportunity" for starting to tackle the challenge ahead.

Now, this is on the second page. One of the charts here on the second page—you hardly get into this report, and it says right here, exhibit number 2, that Ontario has a significant prosperity gap with its North American peers. You look on the chart. Where's Ontario? Second from the bottom.

They got the advice from the expert panel. What do we get in the budget? Tax increases, not decreases.

Now, if you go through here and look, and I think this is most important if we listen—some of the pages might be interested in this, because other people aren't listening.

On page 53, it says, "Encouraging world-leading innovation and growth in Toronto's financial services cluster." Now, we've all heard that the financial services cluster is the future. Some of you young people want to take commerce, economics, the integration of capital, raising capital and investing capital to secure our futures, because money has to be invested and managed properly. We need that sector and it's global today. It says right here that earlier this year, "the institute worked with the Toronto Financial Services Alliance (TFSA) to assess the key strengths and weaknesses of the financial services cluster versus its North American competitors. The report will inform the work of the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade in the development of a provincial strategy to support continued growth in the sector."

Now, overall, they are seeking this advice from these experts. What are they doing? Nothing. The outcome by any measure, by any headline I could read, whether it's General Motors or the other sectors that are in trouble—the member from Waterloo–Wellington today reported that a company that did get money from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade actually laid people off yesterday, just as we saw in Windsor. They were part of the Beacon project, and they're actually laying people off. But this report was basically avoided by the Minister of Economic Development—trying to grow the economy. This is about the budget bill. That's what we're talking about here.

I'm going to chart number 18 in this report. It says, "Taxation of new business investment is higher in Ontario than nearly all OECD countries." It's not just Jim Flaherty saying it, it's not just the Ontario Chamber of Commerce saying it. Here is another group, the competitiveness panel of experts, saying it. There it is, right at the top of this chart. It's one of these scatter charts.

I get troubled. I have five children. You probably know that, because every time I speak I mention it. It is worth remembering, because I think we're here to make the future and opportunities better for all. Regardless of political stripe, doing the right thing will always get you the results you want.

Page 45, "Motivations: Pursue Smarter Taxation"—that's the title in the report—says, "The incoming government"—this is the current McGuinty government. When Greg Sorbara was Minister of Finance, I had a little more confidence. Currently, I'm not as confident.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, Greg was fairly knowledgeable and I could talk to him. But I don't think anyone is listening any more—not just today, but in terms of these reports I'm referring to.

It says, "The incoming government needs to pursue tax reform as a high priority to raise Ontario's competitiveness and prosperity."

Do I see any of this translated in the bill? The only one I see in Bill 44 is the provision of the tax holiday—I'm going without notes on this—for 10 years, in what we call innovation companies. These are companies that take commercialized, academic research.

Hon. John Gerretsen: You like that idea?

Mr. John O'Toole: That is a good idea.

I'm getting a response from the Minister of the Environment, which is always good; first, it shows that he's here, and second, that he's awake.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: It is late in the afternoon. There was nothing—

Hon. John Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As this member well knows, I'm always awake when I'm in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I can confirm that as well. The Minister of the Environment is indeed always awake.

I would ask the member for Durham to return to his comments and be polite.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's good to get a response, because at least it proves someone was listening.

What I'm trying to say is, it was a very positive comment on that section—the tax holiday on innovative businesses, mostly to do with technology and transferring of technology into commercial products. These could be software-type solutions or like Jim Balsillie of Research in Motion.

That's an important recognition. The truth is that for almost all new businesses that venture into the commercial world, there's a very high failure rate and often there's no profitability.

In fact, I can tell you a personal story—and this is something I'd like to put in Hansard because it happens to be true. I happened to be at an event, I think it was in 1996, and there were people there who knew what they were talking about, certainly, and I was listening. They did mention it. They said, "Have you heard of RIM?" I had no clue what they were talking about. As soon as I left that particular venue, I did phone someone—because I took the Canadian securities course some time ago—who was at TD Waterhouse at the time, now CIBC, and I said, "Have you heard—?" He said, "No, it's not traded. It's an over-the-counter stock." I'm telling you a fact here. He said, "They're another R&D company that is all R&D but has no revenue. It's all government kinds of investments"—and indeed it was.

There's another similar company, in ethanol, which I have looked into. It has a very good prospect, but there's no revenue. It has never made a cent in eight years, and it's gotten millions of federal dollars in the making of ethanol from fibrous material, primarily straw. It's located in Ottawa. It will be commercial some day when they get the right enzyme to make the straw into ethanol, to make it into a sugar, I suppose. My point is that many of these companies take more than five years to make any money. The amount of money committed in the budget would be miniscule. What they are missing here is a strategy and a backup plan.

1540

I talked a lot about the Roger Martin report, and I just want to move to some real initiatives that came up this morning at the committee hearings. The hearings this morning were revealing because the minister was responding to Murray Campbell's story in the paper today about how little control Ontario, or indeed Canada, has over American-based companies, saying that it wasn't much of a plan at all to try and rescue the manufacturing sector.

I think there was a report tabled this morning which was quite interesting, and I'm just going to go through it, because it does talk about some of the work being done by the ministry that would be charged with stimulating the economy. This report talks about several programs and amounts of money. I'm going to have to correlate these programs that I have here. For instance, it talks about a program that Minister Pupatello talked about, the AMIS program, which is the advanced manufacturing investment strategy. These are sums of money invested on behalf of the McGuinty government in sectors to create jobs or secure the permanency of jobs. The question to the minister was, "How much of the commitment is spent and how many jobs have been secured?"

I heard this morning the statement by—I have to look up his riding, actually—the member from Wellington–Halton Hills, Ted Arnott. He was saying that a company in his riding, which I believe is Skyjack Inc., during this program, the advanced manufacturing investment strategy, had just laid off a number of people. It committed to retaining 358 jobs, provided the government gave them $2.48 million, and here he is saying that there were 107 jobs lost. The question then becomes, are we getting value for taxpayers' money?

We saw the same questions being asked of General Motors yesterday and General Motors a week ago. As part of the Beacon project, they got some amount of money, and that amount of money was apparently—I'm reading it here—$175 million. Of that $175 million, part of it was to commit in the contract for the creation of 900 jobs.

If the minister who is making the promise, as the government—I'm not opposed to these kinds of transactions. What is missing here is the accountability. Did in fact those jobs get created or not? That's what the taxpayers want in transparency and accountability. I can tell you, without being insulting or critical, that the minister was stymied. She had no answers. I'm saying that on the record here to be used at a later date, probably during an election.

There were other parts of accountability that are worth mentioning, not just the Beacon project that I mentioned.

There was Linamar in Guelph, which the member was talking about. They created a technology centre, plus investments in research and development and skills training, and the provincial support was $44.5 million. The list goes on. It's rather a long list. I think that's what the viewers should be aware of: It's a long list and it comes up to millions, indeed, hundreds of millions of dollars.

In the budget, what you're asking for is to recognize the state of the economy. In a sort of summation here, the best way to look at it is, when you see jobs in the private sector or the public sector, what are the implications for the economy? Well, jobs in the private sector generate, if you will, the added value, the creation of wealth; that is, harvesting resources, be it trees or metals, applying technology in R&D to them, and making those resources into products. Some of that can be pure information which is sold globally, a transfer of knowledge globally. Those are important resources that come out of innovation centres like the University of Waterloo or the Rotman school of business or any of the great schools and educating centres we have in Canada.

When you grow the GDP, the gross domestic product, and your exports, your GDP goes up, the revenue of the province of Ontario and indeed the country goes up. If you need any better proof, look at Alberta. They're exporting a lot of their natural resources, the crude and that, which is another debate in itself. The federal government is flush with cash. Why? Because Alberta's economy is pumping stuff out of the ground, applying something to it, and selling it on the market and making lots of money, and the royalties go to the governments. That's how governments make money. What they do with that money is the important thing, how they redistribute it through health care and through education, making our communities better and safer—great things. But those functions don't create wealth. They consume wealth, which is not questionable. They make our consumers and indeed our quality of life better.

What I see going away now are the jobs in those sectors, like resources, pulp and paper, auto, manufacturing. They're going away. The tax revenue is going down. So to make up for it, the tax revenue is going up in other ways: in penalties, fines and other levies. So, in conclusion, be aware of this budget.

The message I would leave for the viewer is this: Taxes are up, spending is up, jobs are down. Stay tuned.

Energy prices are doubling. They call it a smart meter. It's anything but a smart meter. It is a time-of-use meter. What that means is, if you do your dishes at the wrong time of the day, the cost of energy is going to go up 100%. That's a tax—because energy is a non-discretionary consumption tax. You've got to wash your clothes and heat your food.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you for the opportunity to get up and speak briefly to Bill 44, but primarily to the presentation made by my colleague from Durham in pointing out the challenges within the budget document and speaking of the government spending $1 million to get a report to get some advice on where they should put their resources and where they should get those resources from. I think he made a good case for trying to balance the two. Obviously, they commissioned the report, with very qualified people to prepare the report, and then when they got the results, for whatever reason that would only be known to the treasurer and the Premier, they decided not to utilize any of the report. As was mentioned during his presentation, it would appear that they neglected to read the report. It seems a shame that they would spend so much to prepare it and then not use it.

I would have much preferred that they had not spent that money giving it to the report, and given that money to the Minister of Agriculture so the Minister of Agriculture could have fully funded the program that the treasurer asked her to put in place to help the beef, the hog and the horticulture commodity groups who were hard hit by the declining price in the marketplace and the high dollar; in fact, they no longer could pay for the feed it took to raise the hogs. If she had had the extra $1 million or slightly more than that, she may have been able to look at the program and look after all the farmers, not just some of the farmers. The minister will tell us on a regular basis that in fact she put the money towards the majority of the farmers, and it would seem that we have to accept that there was collateral damage to that, because it needed to go out quickly. So, obviously, we'll have some losers and some winners.

We have a lot of young and expanding farmers who get absolutely nothing because they weren't in business in the years when the ministry used to evaluate the program, and I'll speak more on that in my—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? I'll return to the member for Durham, in reply.

1550

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Oxford has such a passion for the agriculture sector. From his time when he was a minister, I can tell you, he knows of what he speaks.

We were talking about the best signal for the viewer and the people of Ontario to watch, and it is to see: Are we getting value for money? The acid test is the hard-earned money that people are putting out for what it is, and I guess to the government it's taxes: Are we getting value for the money? That's the best practical interpretation.

We've got the $100,000 list. Whether or not we're getting value for money—I think the highest person there was—was it the WSIB, the person who was just on the spending spree? Or was it the head of the Ontario Public Service pension fund? I think they made over $2 million a year. I think that was the highest. I question that anyone is worth that much, including Wayne Gretzky. I just question that.

This ministry that I am looking at—I'll just read this, because it's worth putting on the record: "Spending in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade is up $341 million since 2002-03." That's a $328% increase. Is it any better? Are we any better off? We're shedding jobs faster than they're spending the money. It's frightening.

Spending is up 400% since 2003. Look: The evidence is in, and it's clear to the people of Ontario. Spending is up, services down. Health tax—they're taxing you more on health. There are waiting rooms in emergency; there are not enough doctors; there are hospitals closing. Brampton's in chaos. Every hospital in Ontario has a deficit. Spending is up; service is down. The budget's a problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to share my concerns with the intended implementation and disbursement of the funds around Bill 44, entitled the Budget Measures and Interim Appropriations Act, 2008.

Bill 44 is about the taxpayers of Ontario and the plan that the McGuinty government has to spend our money. One of the reasons I chose the Ontario PC Party is my very strong belief that the government has an obligation, an inherent responsibility, to treat tax dollars with respect. Unfortunately, at no point in this McGuinty administration have I felt that the public purse is in good hands, so the duty falls to my caucus colleagues and me as the official opposition to defend the taxpayers' hard-earned contributions and to hold this government to account for the direction they are taking the province of Ontario.

Time and time again, the McGuinty government has abused our trust by breaking promises, be it slush fund scandals or tax after tax disguised as user fees and premiums. As a taxpayer, I'm disappointed, but as a citizen of Burlington, quite frankly, I am disgusted by the blatant partisanship at play in this administration.

It became crystal clear last week as I sat in my place and watched the Minister of Health pass blame on nurses and front-line health care workers for the C. difficile outbreak at our hospital, Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital. The truth of the matter is that the funds requested for infection control upgrades at Joseph Brant never materialized, but payouts to Liberal-friendly organizations seemed endless.

Three point one billion dollars yearly of our hard-earned health tax money have been collected under the McGuinty health tax. Let me put this in perspective: This is a total of almost $16 billion since this health tax was initiated, and yet the Minister of Health continues to be unable to find the funds necessary to modernize the aging infrastructure at Joseph Brant and upgrade the infection control protocol. This is bad politics in the name of good government. The minister isn't just playing partisan politics; he is playing with people's lives.

It is about the life of a grandmother who walked into a hospital somewhere in this province with a minor ailment and died as a result of complications attributed to an infectious disease. Can the minister look a family in the eye who has lost their loved one to C. difficile and truthfully say he has funded hospitals adequately and done everything possible to prevent the loss of life?

This is not just the story of Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital. This is the story of all aging hospitals and long-term-care facilities across this province that are not receiving adequate capital and operating funds from this government. Despite this influx of nearly $16 billion of new health tax money, and budget bills like this one that trumpet the increases this government is making in health care, the Minister of Health still refuses to allocate the funds required by aging hospitals across this province to increase their capital expenditure for infectious disease control and has not updated the procedures to minimize the risk to patients, health care workers and their families. So in reference to the line items in Bill 44 that refer to health care spending initiatives, I say: Who can believe what is really going to happen?

Let me state for the record what the people of Burlington need the money to do. They need the money to go to Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital, as it continues to require millions of dollars in renewal funding from the Ministry of Health to upgrade their facility to include modern infectious disease control and updated standards for procedures—in a nutshell, bringing their aging infrastructure into this century.

St. Catharines is the home of our transportation minister, Jim Bradley, and it is getting a brand new hospital and a cancer centre. Mr. Bradley didn't ask for upgrades; he went for the whole pie. Meanwhile, in Burlington, you can't turn sideways in an operating theatre without bumping into a bedpan.

Hospitals and long-term-care facilities across the province need the financial support and resources of the Minister of Health in controlling and managing the spread of this bacteria. Our elderly citizens with compromised immune systems are at the greatest risk. The average age of patients who died as a result of C. difficile was 80 years old; the youngest, 58. Clearly, we need to address this issue.

I'm calling on the Minister of Health to ensure that a portion of the funds allocated to health care in Bill 44 is directed to Joseph Brant hospital. It is the right thing to do.

While we are on the subject of non-Liberal-held ridings mucking long with table scraps, I feel it is important to raise another funding issue. The Burlington Performing Arts Centre has been fundraising in the community for several years now for a new facility. Together with their municipal and federal partners, they have mapped out a very detailed and strategic plan. They have identified and purchased land for the proposed building and they continue to build community support and excitement about this wonderful project. In other words, their i's were dotted and their t's were crossed when their funding request was submitted to the province.

They were disheartened when they did not make the cut for the first round of financing under the public

infrastructure renewal grants—the only municipality in the Halton family of municipalities not to receive funds for their identified project for the MIII funding. However, they remain committed to seeing this project through and have asked to be included in the next round of funding.

How was the first round of funding allocated? Once again, let me tell you that Minister Bradley's riding made out in aces. The Liberal member from St. Catharines received $4 million for a new swimming pool. I'm not opposed to swimming pools; I think that they're a very healthy thing to have in a community. In fact, community pools are important in St. Catharines especially. It has an aging population and it will significantly benefit.

The project concept is not the issue, but the preparations and the state of readiness for this project are. St. Catharines city council simply passed a motion. They do not have a site selected, nor do they have community funding in place, or a clear, formalized plan. The performing arts centre in Burlington asked for that same amount of money. They have a plan and they have raised substantial funds to date, including significant support from the federal government. There is only one piece of this puzzle missing before they put a shovel in the ground, and that is their provincial partner anteing in.

1600

Meanwhile in St. Catharines, the money is sitting in a bank somewhere while the city council decides what they want to do to put the pool in process and begin to create plans. This is a clear example of how the McGuinty government cannot be trusted to manage our money. Instead of allocating funding to a project that has community support, a site and municipal and federal funding, they choose instead to send money to the riding of a cabinet minister whose pool project is still yet a dream.

The citizens of Burlington pay taxes just like the citizens of St. Catharines. The taxpayers of Ontario are trusting this government to make decisions based on project readiness and fiscal accountability. How is a city council motion more accountable than a strategic plan with $9 million in community funds raised to date? How is this even comparable?

The McGuinty government loves to tell people that they support arts and culture, yet when asked to put their money where their mouth is, they prefer to play partisan politics than really support arts and culture across this province.

I'm elected to defend the interests of Burlington constituents, and I will do so strongly. I have spoken with the ministers, both Caplan and Carroll, and recently wrote to both ministers regarding this project. In the letter, I clearly state my willingness to discuss the grant application for the performing arts centre and encourage them to approve funding for this facility in the near future, when more dollars are released for projects cited as a priority in communities across this province. I look forward to both ministers taking me up on that offer in the near future. In the meantime, I will continue to watch with bated breath the evolution of the St. Catherines pool and how long it takes for that dream to become a reality.

Bill 44, to me, is full of empty promises, and plans that are quickly dismissed in favour of partisan initiatives.

Today I raised the issue of the Minister of Education's lax accountability for the budget of her trustees. Under the McGuinty government, trustees' expenses have ballooned, unchecked and out of control. The budgetary shortfalls of individual school boards are taken directly out of taxpayers' pockets. How many fundraising activities are parents being asked to pony up while trustees are not being reigned in on their expenses until the horse is out of the barn and the gate is closed?

There are fundamental principles of fairness that are absent from the McGuinty administration, and it's not confined to ballooning expenses. They simply refuse to envelope money, to make that money accountable. Enveloping money ensures that funds that a government allocates to a program go directly to the program they were intended and earmarked for. If funding was enveloped to ESL, to special education or textbooks, you may actually see a real improvement in the quality of our education system.

I chose to address the issues facing my constituents and my critic portfolio because at the end of the day, Bill 44 is meaningless, because the McGuinty government is unable to lay out a financial strategy and actually execute it. This is untrustworthy, it is incompetent and it is surely uncaring.

Well, Premier, for the talk that you provide, I know you feel that talk is not cheap, but neither is it cheap for the millions of Ontarians who send to you their hard-earned tax dollars. They have been waiting for a long time to see any positive effect of the money that they send to you. You have a dismal track record for a government putting forward its fifth budget.

Let me put the financial picture of Ontario's economy into perspective. Ontario has lost over 200,000 manufacturing jobs since 2004. Ontario's per capita fiscal capacity has fallen from roughly $400 above the equalization standard four years ago to just $84 over the average last year, making it very likely that Ontario will become a have-not province. Ontario had the second-lowest growth in the country in 2007—we were the leader. Business investment in Canada has expanded for the 12th consecutive year, but Ontario's economic growth has been below that national average. Why? Because the least competitive tax structure is here in Ontario, because uncompetitive electricity prices are here in Ontario, because red tape is here in Ontario and because the heavy burden of business regulations is here in Ontario.

You have a tax-and-spend record. Let's put the total spending of the Dalton McGuinty government into perspective. It took from Confederation and our first Premier, John Sandfield Macdonald, until 2003 and the then-Premier Ernie Eves to get spending from zero to $68 billion annually. Dalton McGuinty's budget is projecting

program spending in 2008-09 at—get this—$87.3 billion. This, folks, is up $28.2 billion, or 48%, since this government took office in 2003. The budget's projected revenue of $96.9 billion in 2008-09 is up $28 billion, or 41%, since 2003. Revenue for 2007-08 is up $5.1 billion from the 2007 budget and program spending is up nearly $5 billion, or 10%.

This government claims that it is lowering the cost of doing business. What are you doing? Well, let me tell you: You're eliminating the capital tax, but only for manufacturing and resource sectors; all the others have to wait. In 2003, when the Liberals formed government, the corporate income tax was at 12.5%. Today, the Liberal government can boast a 14% corporate tax. You froze the small business income tax rate at 5.5% and cancelled the scheduled rate reduction to 4%. The Liberals significantly increased these taxes in one of the biggest tax hikes in Ontario's history.

So my question is, when can Ontarians expect good jobs, good health care, good education and a healthy environment? When do you intend on using Ontarians' hard-earned tax dollars to work for Ontarians rather than blaming previous governments and our federal partners?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to comment on the speech from the member from Burlington. She of course has been talking about Bill 44, the budget bill. The member from Burlington is a new member to the Legislature and she's doing a great job of looking out for the interests of the people of Burlington. She raised many health issues specifically from the riding of Burlington in her speech.

I have one budget-related issue from my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka that I wanted to briefly mention, and that's the after-hours urgent-care coverage at the Burk's Falls and District Health Centre, which unfortunately ended March 31—and that's coverage from 6 to 9 on Monday to Friday and on weekends, which is very important to the Almaguin and Burk's Falls area. It would have required $107,000 of funding from this government to keep the doctors there to provide the coverage. Unfortunately, even though this government had $5 billion in extra revenue this year that they didn't plan on in their $96-billion budget, they couldn't find $107,000 to keep those important health services going.

The member mentioned red tape issues. I can tell you, as the critic for small business, that red tape is a huge issue for small business. It's a big impediment; it's a $13-billion cost in the economy.

I met last Friday with a representative of the tow truck association. They were telling me how, if you have a big accident on the highway, even though they have a permit to take oversized loads, they end up having to go back to their office, paying an extra permit fee, and then they've got to take a faxed copy of it back to where the vehicle is blocking the highway, in many cases, to be able to clear the roads. That's just one small example of the thousands and thousands of regulations that this government has that cause increased costs to business.

My congratulations to the member for Burlington on a fine speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Burlington has two minutes to reply, if she wishes.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Budgets come and budgets go, and the trust is put in government to make sure that those things that we send money to Queen's Park for are looked after. The problem is that when we have an account called general revenue, everything goes into a black sinkhole. We can't trace back how much of the $16 billion that's been collected over the last four and a half years has actually gone into the health tax.

I think Ontarians should have the right to know where their money is being spent, how much of it is being spent, where and why. It's never clear, in the five budgets that have been brought forward—there have always been photo ops, a lot of clapping and rah-rah, but the clearness, accountability and transparency of where this money is being spent is not there.

We cannot continue to tax and spend. We cannot continue to be at a level of $30 billion higher in four years of spending. What's going to happen in the next four years? Are we going to continue in this pattern? We're going to create families that can no longer afford to live in Ontario. Families are already moving out because the jobs are gone.

I think that the government has to sit up and listen. The government has to pay attention to what Ontarians are telling them, and the budgets being put forward from here on in need to have far more accountability and transparency, and far more emphasis on issues that Ontarians feel are important.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? Mr. Bryant has moved third reading of Bill 44. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell—no, a 10-minute bell.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): A 30-minute bell; I apologize.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have received a deferral slip. Pursuant to standing order 28(h), this vote will be taken at the time of deferred votes tomorrow afternoon.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1613.

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Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, government House leader / ministre des Affaires autochtones, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (L)	Barrie	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for seniors / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
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Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
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DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (L)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (ND)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (L)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, David (L)	Sault Ste. Marie	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (L)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader of the Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Minister of Revenue / ministre du Revenu
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Greg (L)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Opposition House leader / leader parlementaire de l'opposition
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	

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